

**Whatever Happened to Respect?
Values and Change in a Southwest Ethiopian (Aari)
Community**

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Whatever Happened to Respect? Values and Change in a Southwest Ethiopian (Aari) Community

Julian Sommerschuh

Abstract

Based on 22 months of fieldwork in highland southwestern Ethiopia, this thesis focuses on the role of values in processes of social change. The thesis thus joins current efforts to move beyond seeing values exclusively as factors of social reproduction. Extending earlier research, I argue that it is not only the adoption of new values that can lead to profound change. Established values can be powerful drivers of change, too: The desire to realize their values more fully can motivate people to take up new and substantially different forms of practice. At the same time, what promises a fuller realization of one value may turn out to undermine another, and this can motivate further change.

My theoretical argument emerges from an ethnographic analysis of change in Dell, a rural Aari community in Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region. The starting point of this analysis is the people of Dell's frequent lament about a change for the worse in the social life of their community. On their account, feasting and everyday hospitality are on the wane, neighbours hardly visit each other anymore, there is less unity and affection among kin, and greed, envy and selfishness are on the rise. Summarily, Dell people discuss these changes as a decline of 'respect' (Aari'af: *bonshmi*, Amharic: *keber*). To explain this decline as well as to understand how people cope with it, this thesis examines the recent history of Dell.

The first part of the thesis shows that the decline of respect has been an effect of attempts to better realize established values through new cultural means. First, since the late 1990s, almost two thirds of the population have become evangelical Christians. Motivated by a quest for blessings, conversion came at the cost of respect: it is only by abstaining from numerous practices which previously mediated respect that God's blessing can be secured. Second, over the past decade, Dell people have embarked on a quest for economic development. Motivated by a long-standing concern with building 'name' through wealth, the pursuit of development requires shifting resources from kinship and commensality – which afford respect – to modern forms of wealth – which do not. In the second part of the thesis, I examine two responses to the decline of respect, both of which constitute attempts to revive a more respectful mode of sociality. I discuss the Evangelicals' current struggle to mobilize Christianity as a way to confine people's feverish quest for development and the antagonisms that are its result. And I analyse the recent emergence of an Ethiopian Orthodox community in Dell as an attempt to rebuild relations centred on commensality.

Primarily a contribution to the anthropology of values and the study of change, this thesis also engages with debates about Christian individualism, economic development as an ethical project, the relation between evangelical Christianity and economic development, and dis/continuity in conversion to Orthodox Christianity.

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A Note on Language and the Transcription of Aari'af Terms

Aari'af has long borrowed from Ethiopia's national language, Amharic, and today features many loan words. I indicate Amharic terms by underlining them when they first appear in the text and I italicize them afterwards. Aari'af terms are italicized throughout.

Personal names have been anonymized.

ʒ – voiced postalveolar fricative, as in the English 'vision'

t', ts', ch' – explosives

s – voiceless alveolar sibilant, as in the English 'sea'

x – voiceless velar fricative, as in the German 'Bach' or the Spanish 'ojo'

z – voiced alveolar fricative, as in the English 'zoo'

Glossary of Key Terms

alem – follower of traditional practice; from Amharic ‘world’

amain – evangelical Christian; from Amharic ‘believer’

anze – blessing

ateri – sadness

bonshmi – respect, deference

buti – to confess

darilsi – transgression, sin

karta – traditional practice

Gamma – generic term for people from northern Ethiopia

gabinti – ‘growth’, economic development

gomma – suffering caused through a transgression

manna – low-caste person

miks – beg, pray

nami – name, reputation

negane – forgiveness

toidi – lineage head

xantsa – high-caste person

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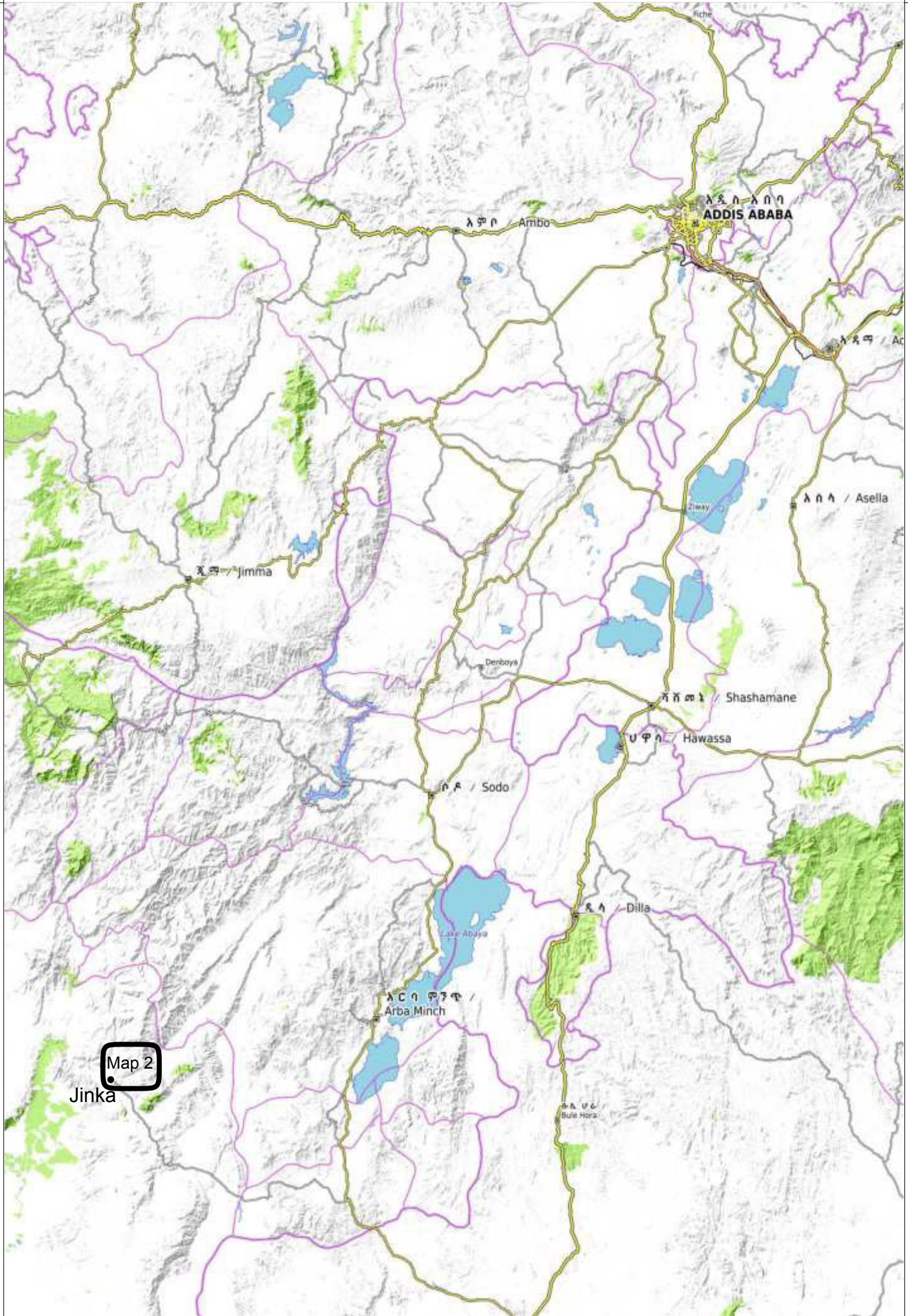
This dissertation would not have been possible without the people of Dell. Thank you all for welcoming me so warmly and for your patience with my interminable questions. *Berri jen immane!*

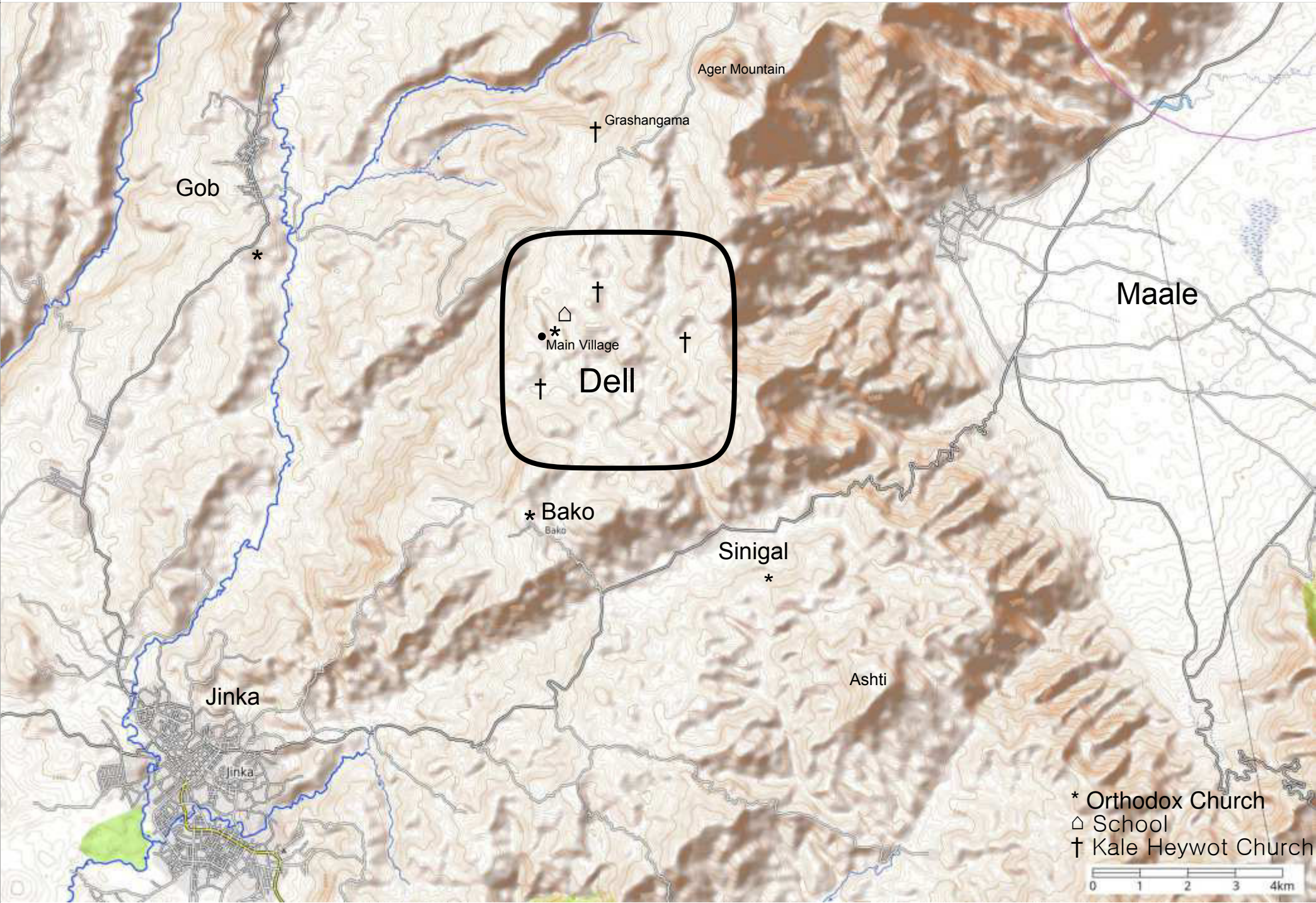
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Introduction

i. Starting Points

With a sudden move, Hastabab jumped to his feet. 'I'm off', he announced abruptly, having arrived only a few minutes earlier. 'I'm in a rush. Really, there's no time. So thanks to you! I will return it in the evening.' Leaving behind a half-empty cup of coffee, Hastabab picked up the sickle he had come to borrow from his neighbour Kalibab and briskly walked out of the house into the bright morning sunshine.

For a few moments everyone silently listened to the flopping noise made by Hastabab's sandals as he strode away. Then, helping himself to another handful of roasted grain and reclining in his chair, my host father Kalibab said with a sigh,

'You see, Juli, that's what I've been telling you about. These days people only come to visit when they want something from you. They don't come just like that. They don't say, "I'll go and drink coffee with my neighbour, I'm longing to see my neighbour!" No, they only come when there's a problem or when they want to borrow something. And when they come, they don't stay. "I'm in a rush", they say, and off they go.'

Now Mangeshinda, the second of Kalibab's three wives, joined the conversation. A mother of eleven and in her mid-50s, Mangeshinda was not usually prone to talk a lot in her husband's presence. But here was a topic that was clearly a burning issue for her and that called for her contribution. A recent visit to the house of one of her younger brothers still on her mind, Mangeshinda began telling me about how in the past, when you visited your brother, 'he wouldn't let you go home quickly.' His wife would make coffee and bring beer, Mangeshinda explained. 'And then we would sit together, chatting, chatting, chatting.' 'If you said that your stomach was full', she reminisced, 'your brother would cry out:

"Oy! Sister! What's the matter with you? Don't go yet! It's bad to make haste. Why do you make haste like a *manna* (lower-caste person; alleged to do all things hectically)? That's not our custom, is it? Stay a little longer, sister, just a little longer. Your conversation hasn't yet sated me. We will drink another cup of coffee, or two if we like.'"

So you would sit together with your brother for a long time, Mangeshinda continued her account, and later, 'when it started getting dark and you were about to leave, he would fetch some grain from his granary. "How can I let you go empty-handed?" he would ask, "What are your people going to say about me? << This one doesn't know how to treat his sister

with respect >>, they will say. So take this grain and go. May we meet again soon.”
‘But today’, Mangeshinda concluded with a tinge of sadness in her voice, ‘today where are the brothers that give you grain? Where are the kin who chat with each other as we chatted in the past? Now kin no longer love each other and everyone only thinks about themselves. Truly, these days there just isn’t any more respect (*ta bonshmi daki*).’

* * *

‘There just isn’t any more respect these days’ – it was a lament I heard many times during my fieldwork in Dell, a rural Aari¹ community perched on the southwestern tips of the Ethiopian highlands. Whether conversing with my host family over breakfast, as in my introductory vignette, or interviewing informants, or listening to people talk among themselves – conversation often came around to what Dell people summarily described as a decline of respect (*bonshmi*).

One part of this lament concerned reduced visiting and hospitality among neighbours and kin. My interlocutors suggested that previously it was much more common for people to pay each other spontaneous visits in the morning or evening (the time when families gather for coffee and food). They also recalled how returning from your field in the afternoon and passing by someone’s homestead you were often hailed to come in for a moment ‘to quaff some beer’ (*gola shamken*) – and how you would then sit together for a long time, chatting and ‘smiling together’ (*kikin jintsh*). But not only did Dell people lament a decline in everyday commensality. Feasting, too, was discussed as being on the wane. Funerals and weddings, for instance, now were over much more quickly than in the past, I was told. And where kin had regularly united for lineage rituals – sacrificing sheep and eating together for a whole day – they now hardly took notice of each other and everyone went their own way. Finally, there was also frequent talk about reduced cooperation and an increase in conflict, jealousy and selfishness. All in all, my interlocutors expressed the view that recent years had seen a change for the worse in the social life of their community and that people now made less efforts to cultivate affectionate and respectful relationships.

Dell people’s laments about a decline of respect are far from unique in contemporary Ethiopia. Similar discourses are now widespread across the country and have started to register on the ethnographic record. In the Gamo Highlands, for instance, 100 km northeast

1 The Aari are an ethnic group of around 290.000 people (Population and Housing Census 2008: 84), who mainly live in the South Aari district of South Omo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region.

of Dell, Dena Freeman observed a decline in practices of respectful greeting and visiting as well as rising concerns about resentment and jealousy (2015a: 162-166). On the Zege peninsula in Amhara region Tom Boylston noted a pervasive ‘narrative of loss’ concerning a ‘decay of hospitality’ (2018: 105). And in inner-city Addis Ababa people described to Diego Malara how ‘heavy’ it was to maintain respectful relations with neighbours and kin (2017: 66).

This widespread sense of a decline of respect is all the more significant given that respect (Amharic: *keber*) has often been described as a – if not *the* – key value in Ethiopian life. Some decades ago Donald Levine suggested that, ‘[f]orms of obedience and respect comprise the principal fibre of the Amhara social fabric’ (1965: 105), and this suggestion has recently been endorsed by Boylston and Malara (2016: 49-53). The centrality of respect has also been emphasized for other ethnic groups such as the Arsi-Oromo, who refer to respect as *wayyuu* (Østebø 2018: 73), or the Wolaita, who speak of *bonscho* (Data D. Barata personal communication). In the concise words of one locally produced guidebook sold on the streets of Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia, ‘[a]mong many traditional customs, respect is very important’ (Tesfaye 2017: ix).

Given the high value many Ethiopians place on respect, it is important to understand what accounts for the widespread sense that respect is on the decline. The works of Boylston, Freeman and Malara offer first insights on this question, pointing to the role of successive modernist governments’ attacks against feasting (Boylston 2018: 105), growing economic competition (Freeman 2015a: 163f.), or the challenges of living in densely populated, resource-poor urban settings (Malara 2017: 66). Yet, the question of what has happened to respect is not central to these scholars’ works. The regional literature could therefore benefit from a more extensive analysis of this problematic. In this thesis I take first steps in this direction by making the following question central to my ethnographic analysis: In the case of Dell, what accounts for the changes that people lament as a decline of respect and how do people cope with this decline?

The Theoretical Problem: How Can Established Values Drive Change?

In order to bring out the theoretical interest contained in the ethnographic situation that I have just sketched, it is helpful to consider two ways in which anthropologists might respond when faced with laments like those heard in Dell.

A first response would be to frame these laments as an instance of nostalgia and, following on from this, to cast doubt on whether the alleged changes have really taken place. This line of reasoning would suggest that when people talk about a past richer in respect this must surely be a romanticization, a longing for something that is unlikely to have ever existed in the form people suggest it did (cf. Angé and Berliner 2004: 4). From this perspective, wanting to ‘explain’ what has led to a decline of respect in Dell would seem misguided due to naively taking for granted what likely is an expression of distorted memory.

Helpful and legitimate as this kind of suspicion may generally be, it is misplaced in the present case. To be sure, there is a good measure of nostalgia in Dell. But this should not blind us to the fact that the lamented changes have really taken place. On the one hand, since the 1990s around 60% of the local population have converted from their traditional religion and practice (*karta*) to an austere brand of evangelical Christianity. Here, what was formerly key to cultivating respectful relations – especially feasting and expanding kinship – is condemned as a source of sin and effectively curtailed. On the other hand, since the early 2000s people in Dell have started to pursue economic development (*gabinti*), and this has come with profound changes in their economic lives. Practices that traditionally were generative of respect, such as the exchange of gifts or hospitality, have been reduced as a result of the attempt to accumulate modern forms of wealth. In brief, when Dell people lament a decline of respect this is more than just romanticism. It points us to substantive changes that have occurred in their community over the past two decades and that call for an explanation.

Here we come to the second way in which anthropologists might respond when faced with laments like those heard in Dell. This would be to assume that, if the lamented changes have really taken place, they must have occurred under compulsion. Why, to put it bluntly, should people give up on something they value unless they are in some way forced to do so? Why should they start to pursue economic development or join an austere brand of evangelical Christianity if what they really care about is cultivating respectful relations through kinship and commensality? Literature on development has repeatedly pointed to the force involved in the imposition of development schemes or ideologies (e.g. Scott 1998, Escobar 1995). One might therefore assume that something similar has happened in Dell. Likewise, we could think of Joel Robbins’ (2004) moving account of the Urapmin people of

Papua New Guinea, who took up Christianity in response to humiliating encounters with colonial powers, which gave them the sense that their traditional values and practices were worthless (2004: 15).

However, this is not what happened in my case. My analysis suggests that the people of Dell did not engage with development or evangelical Christianity because they were forced to do so or because they had come to despise their traditional values. Rather, they engaged with these new cultural formations in an attempt to better realize values which had long been important to them. As I will show, conversion to Evangelicalism was driven by the desire to realize the value of ‘blessings’ (*anze*) more fully. And the turn to development was motivated by long-standing aspirations to build ‘name’ (*nami*)² or reputation through wealth. The use of new means to realize old values, however, led to profound changes in people’s way of life and restricted their capacity to realize the value of respect, which remains important to them.

At this point we have arrived at what is theoretically interesting about the case of Dell: the finding that established values here have driven a process of profound change demands to be theorized. As I explain in the following section, anthropologists have traditionally conceptualized values as factors of social stability and reproduction and thus in opposition to change. Recently, there have been efforts to develop more dynamic accounts of values. These efforts have mainly focused on how changes in values can cause extensive cultural change. By contrast, we do not yet have theoretical accounts of how established values can drive change. The main theoretical aim of this thesis is to contribute such an account. After reviewing scholarship on values I will therefore draw on work by Naomi Haynes (2017) and Max Weber (1946) to develop a model of how established values can drive change. The subsequent thesis outline shows how this model is instantiated in my five ethnographic chapters. In the final part of this introduction, I introduce Dell and my fieldwork in greater detail.

ii. The Anthropology of Values and Change

Since around the turn of the millennium, anthropology has seen the emergence of a number of related fields which together constitute something like an ‘anthropology of the good’ (Robbins 2013a) – an anthropology, that is, which explores, ‘the different ways people

2 The phonetic similarity between ‘*nami*’ and the English ‘name’ is coincidental.

organize their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as good' (ibid.: 457). One key development here has been the growth of an anthropology of ethics (e.g. Laidlaw 2014, Faubion 2011, Lambek 2010). But there has also been rising interest in the study of values, and it is above all to this field that my thesis aims to contribute.

Broadly speaking, work on values so far has proceeded along two lines. First, a number of publications have provided the conceptual groundwork for the study of values (Robbins 2012, 2013b, 2015a; Graeber 2001, 2013; Otto and Willerslev 2013a, 2013b; Iteanua and Moya 2015; Haynes and Hickel 2018). Second, anthropologists have started to use values as an analytical tool to understand things in the world (e.g. Robbins 2004, Scheele 2015, Haynes 2017).

One of the things anthropologists have studied through the lens of values is change. This recent interest in values and change departs from earlier perspectives on values. It is helpful to briefly recall these earlier perspectives in order to bring out the importance of the current discussion, to which this thesis contributes.

Values as Factors of Stability

The concept of values first gained prominence in anthropology and neighbouring social sciences during the 1950s, when pioneering work was carried out under the auspices of Talcot Parsons and Clyde Kluckhohn (Parsons and Shils 1951, Kluckhohn 1951, Vogt and Albert 1966a). Here, values were understood as cultural standards which people internalize through socialization. This internalization was credited with leading to an alignment between what people desire to do and what they are required to do from the point of view of the 'needs' of society. For instance, when people strive for professional success, or start families, or obey the law – all of which are necessary for the smooth functioning of society – this is not because they are forced to do these things, but because they have been taught to perceive them as good and desirable. As Kluckhohn (1951: 400) asserts forthrightly,

'a social life and living in a social world both require standards "within" the individual and standards roughly agreed upon by individuals who live and work together. There can be no personal security and no stability of social organization unless random carelessness, irresponsibility, and purely impulsive behavior are restrained in terms of private and group codes. Above all, values add an element of predictability to social life.'

In this functionalist tradition, then, values were regarded as key to the production of social order and stability. As such, values were also seen to restrict historical change. This view is particularly evident in the design of the 1950s' most ambitious research project on values, the 'Harvard Comparative Study of Values in Five Cultures'. This study concerned the values of Navaho, Zuni, Spanish-Americans, Mormons, and Texans living in the Rimrock area of New Mexico. These groups had coexisted under similar ecological conditions for several generations. That they had each nonetheless retained their cultural uniqueness was seen as the result of their different values (cf. Vogt and Albert 1966b: 2f.). In other words, values here were conceptualized as factors that make 'cultures' maintain their shape over time.

This 1950s work was certainly important at its time. In retrospect, however, it can be said to have done the concept of values a disservice. This is because the understanding of values as conservative, stabilizing elements in social life made the concept unpalatable to anthropologists once the discipline started to move away from an interest in the smooth functioning of societies. Marxist-inspired scholarship, for instance, was unable to see in values anything other than elements of ideological superstructure that help to perpetuate exploitative social arrangements by blinding subaltern groups to their 'real interests' (Godelier 1977, Bloch 1989, cf. Ortner 1984: 140).³ Similarly, the understanding that to speak of values is to speak of social stability was a key reason why the concept fell out of favour during the 1980s and 1990s, when anthropologists were keen to stress constant flux and variability (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986). Louis Dumont, in turn, who was one of the few major theorists to uphold an interest in values during this period (Robbins 2013b: 99), was repeatedly attacked for his alleged incapacity to deal with change (e.g. Macfarlane 1993: 19f., Graeber 2001: 20). Given that Dumont did pay attention to change (1977, 1986, cf. Ortner 1984: 136), this criticism may in some cases have resulted less from a consideration of Dumont's work than from preconceived notions of what it is to speak about values.

3 This understanding of values as essentially conservative has also shaped broader public understandings. As Julian Bourg (2007: 6) notes in his intellectual history of the May 1968 events in France, Marxism's 'longstanding suspicion toward ethics, morality, and other forms of value-talk', meant that, '[i]f one spoke of "norms" in 1968, one did so mostly to criticize and reject them. Norms were the smoke and mirrors of bourgeois culture ... to be dispelled by the revolution.'

Values Reconsidered

Given that earlier rejections of the concept of values were partly based on its alleged conservatism, it makes sense that recent attempts to revive this concept have been concerned to elaborate more dynamic accounts and to point to ways in which values can be used for the study of change. Joel Robbins (2004, 2005, 2007, 2009a) has been at the forefront of these efforts. Drawing on a Dumontian understanding of values as elements of culture which structure the relations between other elements (2007: 297), Robbins has offered us two main ways to study change through the lens of values.

The first of these ways uses values descriptively. Here, the basic idea is to study a given society's value system at different points in time, and to thus discern how relations between existing values have changed, or what new values have been introduced and how these rank in relation to older values (see Robbins and Siikala 2014: 122-127 for a concise summary). This approach affords a systematic description of change. It is more rigorous than accounts which speak of 'mixture' but do not specify how exactly old and new cultural elements have been mixed, or how profound or superficial the observed change is (cf. Robbins 2004: 5; see for examples of this kind of analysis Eriksen 2008, Kallinen 2014).

More importantly for the present discussion, Robbins also uses values to *explain* processes of change. His basic idea here is that if people take on new values, this entails a reordering of their culture. Just as iron fillings change their position when a magnet is moved from one place to another, so too the elements of a culture get rearranged through changes in the culture's value hierarchy. This is because when people start evaluating their established ways of doing things in the light of new values, they may discover that some of their practices, ideas, or institutions are at odds with these new values. This can lead them to discard these cultural elements entirely, or to rework them, or to confine them to contexts in which they do not pose a challenge to higher level values. In the case of the Urapmin, for instance, the adoption of Christian values led people to abandon most elements of their traditional religion (such as initiations, taboos, and sacred houses), since these were recognized as incompatible with the value of leading good Christian lives and being saved (2004: 93, 220, 145-152). It also led to the problematization of practices which had previously been valued for their capacity to create relations but which, in the light of Christian values, appeared as sinful due to requiring people to assert their will over others (ibid.: 246f., cf. 2007: 309).

By theorizing how changes in values can lead to profound cultural change, Robbins has done much to move us beyond accounts that conceptualize values exclusively as factors of social stability. In this thesis I aim to contribute to Robbins' project of elaborating a more dynamic theory of values by showing how established values can motivate people to change their practice. To be able to make this argument as well as to bring out the difference between our approaches, I need to mention one assumption in Robbins' theory with which I disagree. This is the assumption that changes in values are not simply one possible source of profound cultural change but that changes in values are a *necessary condition* for such change. Robbins derives this view from the work of Marshall Sahlins, and it is helpful to briefly reconstruct Sahlins' argument here.

In an article titled 'The Economics of Develop-Man in the Pacific', Sahlins deals with Pacific islanders' relation to the 'encroaching Western economy' (1992: 13). He begins by observing that when islanders first came into contact with the Western economy, they often used commodities or wealth gained through the market to further their traditional goals. That is, rather than to maximize wealth according to the logic of Western capitalism they used wealth to, say, expand their rituals or become big men (ibid.: 13, 17). As Sahlins puts it, rather than to seek 'development' they sought 'develop-man'. This kind of argument, of course, is well known from Sahlins, who has often shown how indigenous people subsumed new things and ideas under their established cultural categories (e.g. Sahlins 1985, 1988, cf. Robbins 2005: 7). In his 1992 article, however, Sahlins goes a step further and suggests what is required for such projects of cultural reproduction to come to an end. He argues that islanders only moved from 'develop-man' to 'development' – i.e. only started to act according to a Western economic logic – when they were humiliated and came to despise what they had previously valued (1992: 24). Robbins, who has adopted and elaborated this idea, explains it as follows:

'People will not stop perceiving the world that confronts them through their received categories and *bending it to their own values* until they come to see those categories and values – that is, their culture – as something shameful and debased' (2005: 4, my emphasis).

On Robbins' account it were precisely such experiences of humiliation which led Urapmin to adopt Christianity without trying to 'syncretize' it with their traditional culture. What matters to me here, however, is not the argument that it is humiliation which leads people to

stop ‘bending’ the world to their own values. What matters rather is the more fundamental assertion that a change in values (whether through humiliation or some other influence) is a necessary condition for substantive cultural change – meaning change where people engage with new cultural formations such as development or Christianity without trying to ‘bend’ these to their own cultural logics. In other words, my concern here is with the notion that for there to be substantive cultural change, values have to change first.

As I have suggested above, the case of Dell does not conform to this theory: my analysis of the reasons for the decline of respect shows that long-established values motivated people to take up new and substantially different forms of practice. This does not mean that Robbins’ theory is wrong. On the contrary, his theory certainly has great analytical leverage for many cases. My modest point here is that in some instances substantive change can also be motivated by existent values. Before I offer a model of how this can be the case, it may be helpful to point to a further observation which has motivated me to formulate this model. This was trying to understand why my initial research question had not worked out.

Influenced by the above sketched views, I had initially designed a research project that was to look at how values change (i.e. taking values as the dependent variable). This seemed theoretically interesting because if substantive change presupposes a change in values, it is evidently necessary to know more about how values change. Dell seemed to afford such a study. During exploratory fieldwork (carried out between late October 2014 and July 2015) I had been struck by the extent to which life in Dell had changed over the past two decades due to religious conversion and the quest for economic development. I assumed that these changes indexed a change in people’s values, and I wanted to understand the mechanisms through which this change had occurred. In the course of analysing my data, however, I realized that my initial expectations had been wrong: To tease out mechanisms of change one obviously first has to describe what the change in values is supposed to consist in. However, the more I strained myself to describe this change, the more puzzled I grew. For while there had certainly occurred substantive changes in people’s practice, people’s values – that which motivated their practice – had hardly changed at all.

Take evangelical Christians, for example. Their way of life differs profoundly from their pre-conversion practice. They abstain from alcohol, dancing and polygamy, they have adopted novel forms of greeting and speaking, they employ new ways to solve conflicts or

bury the dead or distribute household income, to name but a few changes. At the same time, what motivates Evangelicals' engagement with Christianity – what they say they find attractive about it, and what makes them eager to align their practice with Christian principles – has long been a key value in Dell: to enjoy the 'blessings' (*anʒe*) of good health, children that grow into strong adults, livestock that multiply, crops that give good yields, and so on. Similarly, the pursuit of development comes with profound changes in production and consumption practices. But the value that motivates people to pursue development, i.e. 'growing their name', is a value that has been important in Dell long before development appeared on the scene. The lament about a decline of respect, finally, points in a similar direction. It suggests that people still care deeply about respect – for why else should they be sad about its decline? But it also suggests that there have occurred momentous changes – otherwise people's sense of a decline of respect would be hard to understand. In brief, I found that the values of respect, blessings and name, which had been important in the past, were also the values that mattered most to people at the time of my fieldwork. This finding suggested the need to understand how discontinuity at the level of practice could co-exist with continuity at the level of values. The following model answers to this need by showing how established values can motivate people to change their practice.

Established Values as Drivers of Change

To begin with, let me be clear that by 'values' I mean *conceptions of the good*. That is, I use 'value' not in its economic, linguistic, aesthetic or logical sense but in what David Graeber refers to as the term's sociological sense: 'conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life' (Graeber 2001: 1).

Scholars who take values in this sense often distinguish two levels at which values can be found or two modes in which they can exist: a subjective mode at the level of persons and an objective mode at the level of culture (cf. Brubaker 1984: 62, D'Andrade 2008: 25, Robbins 2015b: 219f.). Robbins has usefully suggested that analytical purchase could be gained from the subjective/objective distinction, for instance for 'engaging questions of the relationship between structure and practice' (2017: 663f.). So far, however, we are still at a relatively early stage of working out what exactly this distinction could help us do, or, indeed, how precisely the relation between the two levels should be conceptualized (cf. Laidlaw 2014: 131). In this thesis I point to one possible use of the

subjective/objective distinction by making it central to my model of change. In the following, I will first describe the two forms of value in more detail. I then suggest how the articulation between them can be a source of change.

The concept of subjective values is easy to grasp. If you desire education and think that it is morally justified to have this desire, then you subjectively value education. A subjective value, in other words, is marked by the conjunction of desire and a sense of propriety. This is often expressed by speaking of values as ‘conceptions of the desirable’ (Kluckhohn 1951: 395). On this account, subjective values are distinct from mere desires, which one might have but not approve of – a desire to eat chocolate, say, or to gossip about others. At the same time, values are distinct from norms, which are considered ‘right’ but lack the element of desire elicited by the ‘good’. As Hans Joas (2001: 44) puts it, ‘norms refer to the obligatory and restrictive dimension of morality, values refer to its attractive dimensions.’ This attractiveness makes values a source of motivation; the desire to realize their values energizes people and leads them to direct their lives in a particular direction. Subjective values, in brief, are those things that particular people find good and strive toward.

To study values as objective phenomena, by contrast, is to disregard the question of what particular people find desirable and to ‘consider value on the cultural level alone’ (Robbins 2004: 11). Education, for instance, is not only something you may subjectively value. You also find this value outside of yourself, for instance in federal constitutions or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Similarly, you might think of the values expressed in religious or political doctrines, such as salvation in Christianity or a classless society in communism. These values are ‘objective’ in the sense that they are an established part of these doctrines, independent of whether anyone actually values them subjectively.

Now, a key idea concerning objective values is that they are not only culturally given statements about what is good. Such values also coordinate (or ‘structure’) sets of ideas, practices, and institutions, in the sense that the latter are geared toward their realization (e.g. Robbins 2009a: 66f.). For example, the value of education coordinates the various elements of the educational system: teachers, schools, universities, the writing of textbooks and so on. Similarly, if one looks at universities, which are one element of this system, the various activities that take place within them – from the cleaning of lecture theatres to the writing of exams – are all ultimately aimed at producing education.

I will speak of a ‘cultural formation’ to designate that which is formed by an objective value and the ideas, practices, and institutions which it coordinates. My understanding of cultural formations is heavily influenced by Weber’s concept of ‘value spheres’ – realms of activity, such as religion or politics, ‘in which certain values, norms, and obligations are immanent’ and which ‘exist independently of and prior to the individuals who participate in them’ (Brubaker 1984: 69, 71; cf. Weber 1946: 323-357). If I prefer to speak of ‘cultural formations’, this is because I wish to include phenomena of different scale and at different levels of abstraction. In my understanding, a country’s educational system is a cultural formation but so is a particular university. Similarly, we can look in abstract terms at the values and associated practices and institutions that characterize Christianity as a whole, but we can also look at a particular instantiation of Christianity in a specific place. As they are commonly understood, ‘value spheres’ are not associated with this kind of scalability but only refer to the most abstract cultural formations found in a society (such as economy, politics, religion etc. in Weber’s treatment, or similarly abstract, though differently shaped spheres in other societies [cf. Terpe 2018: 2].)

The next step in building my model is to specify the relation between subjective values and the cultural formations created through objective values. I would like to make two points. Firstly, I suggest that people mainly realize their subjective values through participation in cultural formations. One may, of course, invent a private religion to guarantee the salvation of one’s soul, or one may seek to educate oneself independently. But mostly it is through attending university or being part of a church – or through participating in any other cultural formation – that people seek to realize their subjective values. Secondly, in order to successfully realize my values through a given cultural formation, I am more or less required to act according to the latter’s own logic. This point derives from Max Weber’s notion of the autonomy of value spheres (Weber 1978: 1116, 1946: 331ff.; cf. Brubaker 1984: 84f.). In Weber’s understanding, value spheres are autonomous in the sense that activity in them proceeds according to a specific logic, and that the logic of a given sphere is not up to the whim of the people who participate in it. The classic example for this is the capitalist economy, which is geared toward wealth maximization. If I wish to realize the value of wealth by way of participating in this sphere, I need to act according to this sphere’s inner logic. This means, for instance, that as an entrepreneur I cannot (at least not at any large scale) give things away for free, since this would soon mean financial ruin. It may

well be that my subjective motivation for participating in the market economy is not wealth per se. I may even wish to acquire wealth to finance the overthrow of capitalism. However, I can only succeed at this if I play by the rules of this system. To give a second example, to realize the value of education through university I need to act along the lines set out by this institution. I may need to attend classes, hand in essays and write exams. Some of this may not conform to my personal understanding of what constitutes good education. Learning for exams may strike me as source of superficial knowledge that will soon be forgotten. Yet, if I refuse to learn for exams and spend my time reading Heidegger, my academic career will come to an end before long, and I will no longer be able to realize the value of education through university.

Having outlined my understanding of the subjective/objective distinction, I now explain how this distinction helps us understand how established values can drive change. A first step here is to repeat that subjective values are ends which people perceive as attractive and which they are motivated to attain.

Now, the desire to realize their values more fully can lead people to look for new and better ways of doing so. Naomi Haynes (2017) has seen this very clearly and provides an excellent example of what this may look like. Haynes writes about the Zambian Copperbelt where ‘moving’ is a key value. ‘Moving’ means ‘progress that comes about through connections to others’ (ibid.: 40). The most common way to realize ‘moving’ is through ties of patronage to wealthier people. In times of economic down-turn, however, this is no longer possible since patrons themselves are struggling to get by (ibid.: 53ff.). The Global financial crisis of 2008 led to a particularly strong down-turn in the Copperbelt economy. In this situation, Haynes argues, people turned to Pentecostalism as a new way to realize ‘moving’. Here progress could (among others) be realized through connections to powerful pastors, who were understood as mediators helping believers access the prosperity promised by God (ibid.: 67).

Haynes does not frame her work in terms of change. Indeed, she explicitly juxtaposes it with studies of Christianity that do look at change (ibid.: 10) and suggests that her study, by contrast, is about shifts in the way that ‘established values are imagined and measured’, and about the creativity that is involved in ‘looking for new ways that old values might be realized’ (ibid.: 11). Given her ethnographic case, Haynes is clearly right to not foreground the topic of change. As she notes, Christianity has long been firmly established

on the Copperbelt. And not only were most of the people in her study brought up as Christians. Many had also been members of mainline Pentecostal or pentecostalized churches before they joined one of the neo-Pentecostal churches that are at the heart of Haynes' study (ibid.: 59f.). These people, in other words, did not have to change their practice a great deal when they engaged with neo-Pentecostalism since they had long been practising Christians.

In Haynes case, then, the use of a new means to better realize an old value did not entail profound change. But in other cases, I argue, profound change can be the result. This is because of the aforementioned need to act on the inner logic of the cultural formations through which one seeks to realize one's values. Where this logic comes with forms of practice that differ significantly from one's earlier practice, a change in one's practice is inevitable if one wishes to attain one's ends.

I may, for instance, subjectively value something like 'brotherly love'. So far I have tried to realize this value through communism. The brotherhood of all people is an objective value in communism, and there are ideas about what is required to attain this end as well as practices and institutions which accord with these ideas. However, I may eventually find that communism does not properly realize the value of brotherly love and I may instead turn to Christianity. Here, a very different kind of practice is required. Instead of violent struggle, for instance, meekness and forgiveness are deemed necessary to realize brotherly love. Throughout, what I ultimately care about has remained the same, but my practice has changed profoundly.

A final element for our model of change is the observation that the change in practice required to realize an old value through a new cultural formation may undermine my capacity to realize other values I care about. While I was able to practice free love as a communist, I am no longer able to do so as a Christian. As we will see, something similar has happened in Dell. Evangelical Christianity and economic development, while affording ways to better realize blessings and name, made it harder to realize respect. This kind of unintended consequence can bring people to look for yet other ways to pursue the ends they care about.

To sum up: The desire to better realize one or several of their personally held ('subjective') values can motivate people to engage with new cultural formations that are geared toward ends (or 'objective values') which resonate with what they hope to achieve.

To successfully attain those ends, however, requires people to align their practice with the requirements of the particular cultural formation in which they have started to participate. This may mean a significant change in their practice.

iii. Thesis Outline

Having provided a theoretical frame for this thesis, I now return to the ethnography which motivated me to elaborate this frame in the first place: the question of what has happened to respect in Dell. My answer to this question is distributed over five chapters. The first three chapters discuss reasons for the perceived decline of respect; Chapters 4 and 5 examine two recent attempts to revive a more respectful mode of sociality. Conceptualized in the terms of my model, my argument is as follows.

Chapter 1 looks at *karta* or ‘traditional practice’. *Karta* was everyone’s shared way of life until the 1990s. But today only one third of the population continues to participate in this cultural formation. Significantly, however, even those who no longer participate in *karta* often talked about it as being ‘good for respect’. This makes *karta* the right starting point for this thesis: What exactly is meant here by ‘respect’? What role does respect play in *karta*? And if *karta* is deemed ‘good for respect’, then why have so many people stopped participating in it? Examining the ideology and institutions of *karta*, the first part of the chapter shows that respect is a key objective value that structures the activities in this cultural formation. We encounter an ideology of social hierarchy, which asserts that people need to show respect to their seniors in order to receive blessings from them. We also see how life in *karta* is oriented toward kinship and commensality, which both turn out as central to realizing respect. But if *karta* is ‘good for respect’, people in Dell also perceive it as an obstacle to leading richly blessed lives. Experiences of suffering and a general perception of *karta* as ‘dangerous’ are the main reasons why a majority has stopped participating in this cultural formation. The second part of the chapter therefore seeks to understand why *karta* is perceived as dangerous. Noting that all suffering in this system is understood as the result of disrespecting seniors, I show that it is often seniors’ own relentless quest to be respected which drives juniors into acts of disrespect. As a consequence, there emerges a sense of *karta* as a system in which it is hard *not* to fall prey to seniors’ anger and the suffering it is thought to entail.

Since the 1990s, the desire better to realize the value of ‘blessings’ (*anze*) has motivated many people in Dell to convert to evangelical Christianity, and today some 60% of the population confess to be amain (Amharic for ‘believer’). So what does it take to realize blessings through Evangelicalism rather than through *karta*? What kind of change in practice may this require? Chapter 2 examines these questions in order to understand how conversion has affected respect. I show that there is a pervasive concern among *amain* to avoid sin because God blesses the righteous but punishes sinners with suffering. Crucially, a key form of sin is disrespecting others, and this applies for everyone, whether senior or junior, kin or stranger. Thus the importance of being respectful is not only reaffirmed but further emphasized. If many people in Dell nonetheless feel that Evangelicalism has played a part in the decline of respect, this is because respect in this cultural formation is ultimately less important than blessings. I show how the paramountcy of blessings leads respect to be sacrificed wherever it threatens to hinder the realization of blessings. Specifically, I show how concerns about feasting as a source of sin have led to a stark reduction in commensality. Many Evangelicals struggle with this reduction since it means that there are fewer occasions to be in respectful interaction with each other. Here, Evangelicalism is felt to undermine respect, and for some people this is a reason to revert to *karta*.

In parallel to the rise of Evangelicalism, everyone in Dell has started to participate in another new cultural formation, namely economic development or ‘growth’ (*gabinti*). First promoted by local state institutions in the early 2000s, Dell people engaged with development in a quest to better realize the value of *nami* – ‘name’ or reputation. Chapter 3 examines this quest and its consequences for respect. I explain that name has long been an important value in Dell, but that until recently it was realized through wealth in people and sponsoring feasts. Since the 2000s, progress at development – reckoned in terms of ownership of modern goods – has become the primary metric to assess reputation. I explain how this shift took place, arguing that Dell people embraced modern consumption to improve their name vis-à-vis Northern Ethiopians (known as ‘Gamma’), whom they consider superior to themselves. Moreover, acquiring modern goods affords a greater name vis-à-vis people within the community since these goods are understood to turn their owner into a Gamma – and thus into a greater person. In the final part of the chapter I show how realizing name through development requires people to act on the inner logic of this cultural formation. Wealth needs to be reinvested or converted into modern goods rather than to be

spent on kinship and commensality. This, however, means that building name through development runs directly counter to creating and cultivating respectful relations.

Though development's detrimental effect on commensality may be of little concern to Dell Evangelicalism, there has in recent years nonetheless emerged an explicit evangelical critique of development. This is because the increasingly feverish quest for development is seen as an obstacle to realizing the vision of a world in which people are united in humility and mutual respect. The quest for wealth-based reputation, the local church observes, leads people to privilege their own interests over the interests of others, to be boastful, or even to use aggressive means to get an economic advantage. Chapter 4 reconstructs this critique and goes on to ask how the church currently seeks to defend the vision of a society marked by mutual respect. I show that one defence consists in reminding people in moments of illness that they cannot realize blessings – and thus economic progress – by disrespecting others. Secondly, I discuss the efforts of dedicated Evangelicals to lead by example and to renounce economic opportunities wherever these threaten to lead into sin. I suggest that one of the reasons why these people are able to invest less effort into economic progress is that local Evangelicalism allows them to gain a name on the basis of Christian virtue rather than on the basis of wealth.

In Chapter 5 I look at a second recent development which is partially a reaction against the decline of respect: the emergence of a small community of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. I begin by showing that those who converted to Orthodoxy aimed to realize two values more fully: Having had difficulties to obtain blessings in *karta*, they embraced Orthodoxy as a new source of blessings. And having come to perceive lacking a 'religion' as shameful, they hoped to realize the value of name more fully by taking up Orthodoxy. In the second half of the chapter, I show that, beyond affording blessings and reputation, the particular attraction of this cultural formation is that it features commensality as a key objective value. Feasting (next to fasting) is the main form of lay religious engagement in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. This allows Dell converts to recreate relations centred on commensality and to thus enter into the kinds of respectful interactions which they value.

In the conclusion, after summarizing my argument, I point to a further reason for Dell people's sense of a decline of respect: religious pluralization has made it more difficult to coordinate social life. At the same time I note people's everyday efforts to bridge

religious cleavages and suggest that these efforts point us to their ongoing shared concern with building a world rich not only in reputation and blessings but also in respect.

iv. Introducing Dell – Place, History, Fieldwork

Dell is located in the southwestern corner of Ethiopia, at 420 kilometres from the country's capital, Addis Ababa. Your way to Dell takes you through Jinka, the capital of South Omo Zone. Until a few years ago, Jinka was a sleepy town with a couple of unpaved streets and a sputtering generator for its only source of electricity. Located at a bumpy six hour ride from Arba Minch – which is an hour's flight away from Addis – Jinka was literally at the end of the road. Due largely to agro-industrial developments now underway in surrounding lowland areas, Jinka has recently become a buzzing regional hub. The main street was paved, a roundabout built and new cafés exude an almost-metropolitan flair. Electricity is more reliable than in the capital, and in 2017 an airstrip was opened to cater to the growing numbers of Ethiopian and Chinese professionals coming to work in the region.

If you get to Jinka on a Saturday, you will meet some people from Dell at the market, selling horse-loads of leafy cabbage, grain and onions. Following them back home in the afternoon, your way takes you into the green hills that rise steeply behind Jinka. A narrow path winds itself uphill past small fields and homesteads, through patches of palm forest and across pleasant creeks. The higher you get, the more stunning the view: there are mountain ranges toward the East and the West, and in the South there is an immense plain that stretches all the way down to Kenya. Three and a half hours later, and having climbed almost 800 metres, you arrive on a ridge that commands a fine view of Dell.

Located at an altitude of 2000 to 2300 metres, Dell sits on the southern edges of a mountain mass known as the Aari mountains. Dell, which is a kebele (the smallest administrative unit of the Ethiopian state, see below), covers some 20 km² of hilly, fertile terrain, some of it forest covered, most of it cultivated. Toward the north you see a towering volcanic peak. Locally known as *Ager* and a popular destination for evangelical prayer outings, this mountain marks the boundary to Shangama, as the area further into the Aari mountains is called. In Dell's east, there is a steep escarpment, which drops several hundreds of metres into a dry valley inhabited by Maale people. A precipitous slope marks Dell's western boundary.



Figure 1. View of Dell, with Ager mountain on the left

To cross from one side of Dell to the other takes about one hour, and doing so sends you up and down steep hills separated by streams that meander through lush meadows and bamboo groves. In the western part of the territory you find Dell's only village. Founded in 2010 on the initiative of the local administration, this village by September 2017 had grown to about 30 houses. It is proudly referred to by people as their 'town' (katema). Most of the local government employees live in this village, there are several bars, including one with a generator-powered television, and a weekly market is held on Tuesdays. Since a road was cleared in 2014, the village has become accessible via a rough 40 minute motorbike ride from Gob. A small town at the western foot of the Aari mountains, Gob is the capital of South Aari district (woreda), to which Dell pertains.

Dell has a population of around 4000 people. Apart from those in the village, people all live in scattered homesteads, which are surrounded by fields and often no more than a five minute walk away from the next neighbour. Patrilineal descent groups (*mata*) settle in

contiguous areas, and this means that people usually have kin as their immediate neighbours. But since most *mata* are not very large (between 100 to 500 members including children), there will usually also be unrelated people in a given neighbourhood.

Homesteads are commonly encircled by a grove of *arxemi* (Amharic: enset). Reaching several metres of height, the starchy stems of these ‘false banana’ plants are used to make several kinds of food, including a nutritious bread (*washi*), which a 1950s German ethnographer could not help but describe as ‘tasting like sauerkraut’ (Pauli 1959: 95, my translation). Inside the *arxemi* grove there are, depending on the size and wealth of the household, anywhere between two to eight straw-thatched huts (*misa eja*). Roughly one in two homesteads in Dell now also features a rectangular tin-roofed house (corcora). In the case of polygynous households each wife has her own hut. In monogamous households wife and husband live in the same hut or tin-roofed house. Boys and girls, when reaching their teens, build small huts for themselves; boys spend the first one or two years after marriage living in this hut with their wife.

Fathers pass on land at marriage and sons establish their household close to that of their father. Land scarcity has only recently started to become an issue in Dell. For one thing, this is because the 1974 revolution made available extensive lands previously owned by northern landlords (see below). Moreover, until being outlawed by the government in the mid-2000s, clearing forest was a common way to expand landholdings. Forest clearing is still sometimes done, though at the risk of going to prison for several months. Today, landholdings range between half an acre – which is the bare minimum to support a family of six – to ten acres. Most people have between one to four acres.

So far there has been only very little outward migration from Dell, both because land scarcity was not a big issue and because there was very little opportunity for cash labour in the wider region and beyond. This is bound to change soon, however, since a good part of those who are now coming of age will not receive sufficient land to meet their subsistence needs. Many young people today therefore aspire to become mengist seratenia (government employees), such as teachers or health workers. At the time of my fieldwork about 25 young men and women had managed to do so. Some of them had found employment in Dell, while others worked in other parts of South Omo Zone.

Apart from these government employees who ‘eat a salary’, people in Dell make a living in farming. Each household functions as a unit of production and consumption under

the authority of the household head (*eja bab*). The main food crops are maize, sorghum, wheat, barley and peas. Surpluses are sold in the market, and so are cash crops (garlic, onions, beetroot) and sometimes livestock. Sheep and cattle provide meat and milk, and many households also keep bees for honey. The main crop is planted at the start of the long rainy season in early May. The summer months see everyone out in the fields weeding. From September onwards the rains get less and so does work. The main harvest is during the dry season in December and January. A second crop is planted in late February when the short rains set in. This crop is harvested in September or October.

Political History of Dell

During the final two decades of the 19th century, the Abyssinian empire conquered the vast territory which today forms the southern half of Ethiopia through a series of military campaigns (Markakis 2011: 90). At this time, Dell belonged to one of nine small Aari kingdoms, called Baaka⁴. Having but spears to fight against the invaders' guns, Baaka was defeated in 1898, and a garrison town called Bako was established at 1.5 hours' walk from Dell. As elsewhere in the South, conquest for Baaka people meant transition from political autonomy to a state of serfdom. In what is known as the 'gebbar system' (Donham 1986: 37), the northern invaders imposed themselves as landlords on local peasants (*gebbar*), who had to pay tributes and provide corvée labour. Until the 1930s, slavery was widely practised, too (Naty 1994: 261).

Starting in the 1940s, the burden on local people was slightly eased due to reforms initiated by emperor Haile Selassie as part of a project of political modernization (cf. Crummey 2000: 231). Among others, Haile Selassie aimed to replace the *gebbar* system (Donham 1986: 27). Efficient as an instrument of control, it had failed to raise the revenues needed for consolidating the empire because the landlords consumed most of what they extracted from their serfs (Markakis 2011: 12, 99). Hence, the emperor decreed 'the conversion of all taxes and dues from kind to cash and the elimination of all social intermediaries between the state and the payers of tribute (Crummey 2000: 231). In Dell, however, things hardly changed. Due to the high taxes they would have had to pay as independent farmers, many people decided to become tenants (*chisenya*) of their previous landlords; taxes owed to the landlord were lower than those asked by the state (cf. Naty

4 Baaka continues to exist as a territorial entity. However, its leader, the so-called *babi* ('father' or king) no longer has any formal political power and is recognized as a ritual leader only by those who follow *karta*.

2002: 62). The resultant continuity in local power relations was buttressed by the fact that all government structures, including police and courts, were manned by Northerners. This made it hard for Aari people to denounce exploitative practices. By and large, things therefore remained the same until feudalism was blown apart by the 1974 revolution.

Against this background, it is no wonder that when people in Dell today remember ‘the days of Haile Selassie’, they above all speak about the economic exploitation they had to endure. One image I heard repeatedly evoked was that of the landlord who comes to Dell on one of his regular visits. Mounted on a horse that is led by a servant, he is followed by a second servant who carries his gun. Seeing him approach, women and children fearfully ‘run off into the forest’, not least, as one woman explained, because ‘had he addressed us, how could we have answered him, not knowing a single word of Amharic?’ A horn is blown to announce his arrival and call together his tenants. The landlord examines the field they cultivate for him to check if it has been properly harvested or to decree what they are to plant next. He also goes to look at the tenants’ own fields to determine how much tribute they owe. If he sees a fat sheep he seizes it, and if there is honey he takes honey. As one old man put it, the landlord was ‘the milk’s cat’ (*dashite walla*).

We owe to Donald Donham (1999) a formidable account of how, in the wake of the 1974 revolution, this exploitative system came to an end in nearby Maale. Very similar events occurred in Dell. In 1975, the new regime, known as the *Derg*, sent out student campaigners (*zemecha*) to take the revolution to the countryside. ‘They came one evening’ Kalinda, who today is in her late 50s, recalled.

‘I had only recently been married. Kalibab and I lived in a small hut and two of them came to stay with us. They showed me how to use a match... I roasted peas and wheat for them, I served them coffee... The next day they called a meeting and told us that the days of the Gamma (Northerners) were over.’

Incited by the students, people throughout the region sent former landlords running. There was widespread looting of property, and in some cases landlords’ wives and daughters were raped (Naty 2002: 66). In Dell, the only Gamma who had lived there (rather than in Bako or Jinka), a man called Abebe, had mysteriously left some years prior to the revolution. Things therefore remained relatively calm, although a small group of men did set out to kill and eat landlords’ cattle in the neighbouring Sinigal area.

In the same year, Dell became a *kebele*. Sometimes referred to as ‘peasant association’, this institution was created by the Derg and to this day remains the lowest

administrative unit of the Ethiopian state. A couple of huts were erected to house the *kebele* administration – fittingly in the very spot where Abebe had lived – and leaders were elected from among the local population. In the following years, the *kebele* carried out the Derg’s land reform and redistributed formerly Gamma-owned land. The *kebele* was also supposed to serve as a mouthpiece for government teachings. Soon after taking power, the Derg had adopted Marxism-Leninism as its official ideology, and this came with a focus on economic and cultural modernization. Classified as ‘primitive-communalist’ (Naty 1992: 238), groups like the Aari were to give up ‘backward’ customs, especially ‘all traditional practices that were deemed to be exploitative and hierarchical’ (Freeman 2002: 39; cf. Abbink 1997: 241).

People in Dell remember that the student campaigners did bring outlandish ideas, like the one that *manna* and *xantsa* (caste-like groupings) should eat together, or that the *babi* (ritual king) should no longer be respected. However, after the campaigners had left, these ideas no longer had much currency and were promoted only on the rare occasions when Derg representatives from outside of Dell came to speak at meetings. One reason for this is that the newly elected *kebele* chairman was a committed ‘traditionalist’ (and first son of a powerful lineage head). Moreover, and contrary to Donham’s case (1999: 120), there were at that time no evangelical Christians in Dell who could have served as a local vanguard of the attack against traditional practice. This lack of local interest in abandoning *karta* appears as one key reason why this cultural system hardly changed under the Derg, but retained the form it had when first described in the 1950s (Jensen 1959; cf. below p.30)

Dell was also spared the collectivization, villagization and resettlement schemes that wrought havoc elsewhere in Ethiopia (cf. Clapham 2002: 17f.; Pankhurst and Piguet 2009). Retrospectively at least, people’s main critique of the Derg concerns the conscription of young men for the war with Eritrea.⁵ Other than that, this period is remembered rather positively. With landlords gone, this was a time when wealth levels rose and traditional institutions expanded. ‘There wasn’t so much food under Haile Selassie’, one man mused fondly, ‘but during the days of the Derg we really started eating’ (see also Gebre 1997: 860).

5 The actual number of conscripts was low, however. This was widely attributed to the intervention of the then *kebele* chairman. As one man explained in response to my question whether many had gone to war: ‘From here? No, from us only few went because in those days we had a good chairman. He went to our *babi* (ritual king)... This is where he went. He said “people from my land are going away to die, they are caught and brought away to die...”. He went and spoke like this and beat his chest [sign of deference] and the *babi* responded, “Your people will not go. The recruiters will not see them.” “They will not go”, he said, and indeed they did not go. Our *babi* truly heard us.’

In 1991, the Derg was toppled by the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF), which remains in power to this day. Commentators agree that there are both ruptures and continuities between the two regimes (cf. Watson 2006: 74). On the one hand, the EPRDF 'gave up the Marxist metanarrative of socialist progress for a more qualified rhetoric of the devolution of power and economic liberalization, democracy and human rights' (Donham 2002: 151). Thus, religious freedom was proclaimed, ending the Derg's suppression of religion (Haustein and Østebø 2011: 756). Similarly, where the Derg had promoted an ideology of supra-ethnic national unity, the EPRDF adopted a model of 'ethnic federalism'. This means that local cultures and languages are valorized and ethnic groups granted a measure of self-determination. On the other hand, and despite the language of devolution, Ethiopia remains a tightly organized state in which most things happen in a top-down manner (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). As under the Derg, state apparatus and ruling party are thoroughly intertwined (Vaughan 2011). And, as for the Derg, rapid, state-led development is a key concern for the EPRDF, with China often being cited as a role model.

In Dell the first decade of EPRDF rule was marked by a relative absence of the state. Not only was the new regime still consolidating its power at the national level. Also, the local *kebele* administration had closed after Dell and neighbouring Bako had been merged into a single *kebele*, which was administered from Bako. In 1978, a primary school had been built in Dell, and throughout the 1980s there had been around a hundred students per year (most of whom left after Grade 1 or 2). But during the 1990s, student numbers fell drastically and there was even talk of closing down the school altogether.⁶ Similarly, people recall that there was only very little government-ordained communal work. Like the 1980s, the 1990s are mainly remembered as a time when wealth levels were on the rise and traditional institutions expanded (cf. Freeman 2002: 44 for similar observation from the Gamo highlands).

In 2001, Dell became a *kebele* of its own again and the administration was re-opened. In subsequent years, the EPRDF increased its efforts to promote development through local state institutions. A health post was opened, and an agricultural extension worker dispatched to Dell. In 2008, school attendance was made compulsory. Student numbers began to increase significantly, and between 2012 and 2016 the local school expanded from Grade 4 to 8.

6 I owe these numbers to a set of yearly reports dating back to 1980, which I found stored in the local school.

Fieldwork

My fieldwork in Dell was distributed over two periods of eight and fourteen months respectively. My first stay was from late October 2014 to early July 2015; my second stay was from early July 2016 to mid-September 2017. During my first stay I rented a room in the main village and took my meals with a young couple who were both from Dell and who worked as a teacher and a health worker respectively. During my second stay, I lived with a host family in a homestead 15 minutes walk away from the village. The head of this household was Kalibab, who was in his early 60s. Kalibab had three wives, Kalinda and Mangeshinda as well Medayinda who had been widowed and continued to live in her late husband's homestead ten minutes walk away. Kalibab had 15 children, including four married daughters, who had gone to live with their husbands, and three married sons, who had established their own homesteads not far from that of their father. Another son of Kalibab's had become a teacher and was working as the director of the local school. Two further sons were on their way to becoming teachers; they and the remaining children as well as a number of grandchildren lived in Kalibab's homestead.

I carried out my fieldwork in Aari'af, which I learnt during my first stay with the help of two local teachers who knew some English. A South Omotic language (Hayward 1990), Aari'af is Dell people's mother tongue and the language in which everyone feels comfortable. Knowledge of Ethiopia's national language, Amharic, by contrast varies greatly. Most adult women and elderly men speak hardly any Amharic at all, mid-aged men tend to know a bit more, and young people who have attended school for at least six to eight grades are usually fluent. Use of Amharic is largely confined to the context of school, though it may sometimes be used during political meetings or in church. For such cases I have relied on translators.

In terms of methodology, my fieldwork relied on a standard ethnographic approach of participating in local life as extensively as possible and complementing my observations with in-depth interviews. Next to sharing the daily life of my host family, I regularly attended Sunday services, weekly prayer meetings and other events at evangelical and Orthodox churches; I observed lineage rituals, went to more than a dozen funerals and several weddings, assisted bridewealth negotiations and conflict resolutions, sat through political meetings and court hearings, joined people in carrying out communal work and occasionally helped with agricultural labour.

In all this I paid close attention to values: I listened for explicit evaluative statements, whether in everyday talk and gossip or as contained in official discourse. I recorded strong emotions of outrage or happiness, which commonly indicate the violation or realization of key subjective values (cf. Joas 2000: 8, Robbins 2015b: 223). I paid particular attention to the decisions people made about how to use scarce resources, notably time and wealth, and what ends they ultimately hoped to attain in this way. This perspective, notably developed in Munn (1986), is able to reveal subjective values since, as Graeber (2001: 45) notes, '[o]ne invests one's energies in those things one considers most important, or most meaningful.' Finally, taking my cue from Robbins' approach to studying values as objective phenomena (e.g. 2012), I also collected systematic data on the key ideas, practices and institutions of each of Dell's four principal cultural formations, i.e. *karta*, Evangelicalism, Orthodox Christianity, and development.



Figure 2. The main village

Chapter 1. Respect: Its Potentials and Perils in Traditional Practice

1.1 Introduction

‘Ay!’ Esias exclaimed with a big sigh, ‘from time to time it really pains me to see our *karta* (traditional practice) go.’ It was a chilly evening in August 2016, and my host family was gathered in Kalibab’s house to drink coffee. His wife gone to attend a training for health workers, Esias, the third of Kalibab’s nine sons, had come over to join us. Exceptionally bright and quick-witted, Esias had, in 2006, been the first from Dell to finish Grade 10. He had gone on to become a teacher and was now, at age 30, director of the local school. Esias, who had been *amain* (‘believer’) since he was 19, was also widely recognized as one of the most committed Evangelicals and served his church in a leading position. Aware of the government’s and the church’s opposition to *karta*, Esias’s exclamation took me by surprise. Why did it pain him to ‘see *karta* go’, I enquired. Always keen to help me with my research, Esias motioned that I should switch on my voice recorder and answered at some length as follows:

Look, Juli, in the past, when I was a teenager, when none of us had become *amain* yet, our kin group was united. I strongly remember how Gamibab [the head of Amen lineage] called us Amen people from time to time for *ch’iltch’i* (lineage ritual, c. ‘purification’). He would build a bamboo fence around our *kashi* (ritual site) and await us at the entrance. One after the other, in order of precedence (*katay katay*), we crawl through his legs [into the *kashi*]. ... Then we confess (*buts*). If you have become sad about someone, if there has been a quarrel, if you have done something disrespectful, you confess. The one who has done wrong asks forgiveness (*negane*). ... Gamibab stabs sheep – two, three, four sheep. Our fathers look at the intestines. When they have found all the *gomma* (transgressions that lead to misfortune), when the intestines have cleared up, Gamibab grills the [sheeps’] livers. In order of precedence he hands each of us some morsels. Later we eat the cooked meat. The whole day we sit together, we chat, we drink beer, we eat. We treat each other with respect (*kikin bonshebonshda*) ... Let me give you another example. In those days, when *karta* was strong, people ate in *siri* (feasting groups). When a *siri* had come to our house, father [Kalibab] afterwards called his [four] brothers alongside their wives and children. He slaughtered a big sheep for them. Then, when a *siri* had come to their house, they would call us in return. Is all of this not respect (*bonshmi*)? Ay, this is great respect! So, what I’m saying is this: there were surely some bad things in *karta*, but for respect it was good.’

Esias recalls with nostalgia the ritual and social life of his kin group that he witnessed as a boy and teenager. He describes how the Amen people regularly united for ritual and how this involved resolving conflicts and eating together. He also describes reciprocal invitations and hospitality. The implicit background of his narrative is what he and others often discussed as a decline of unity and respect among the five brothers, who, alongside their extended families, constituted Amen lineage. For one thing, the brothers no longer united for ritual, since only the lineage head Gamibab continued to practice *karta*, whereas two of his brothers had become *amain* and two (including Esias's father) Orthodox. But the different households now also hardly ever invited each other for food or coffee – and this despite being proximate neighbours. As Esias's mother, Kalinda, once put it somewhat drastically, 'now everyone only lives in their own house. The only time we see each other is for funerals.' It is against this background of present-day disunity, that Esias wistfully recalls the commensality and sociability that prevailed among the Amen people when they all still participated in *karta*. This memory, in turn, leads him to conclude on a generalizing note: The decline of *karta* pains him, his explanation suggests, because '*karta* was good for respect'.

Esias here voices a sentiment that was widespread in Dell; the notion of *karta* being 'good for respect' was a very common one. Indeed, not only was it upheld by the alem⁷ people, as those who continue to practice *karta* are known in Dell. But I also repeatedly heard Evangelicals like Esias speak along these lines – people, that is, who had 'left' *karta* and who were otherwise critical of it. Opinions differed, however, on whether *karta* had only been good for respect in the past, or whether this was still the case in the present. Evangelicals tended to use the past tense, saying things like, 'previously *karta* was good for respect, but now it has cooled down (*zaste*), now it's useless (*meyay*)'. Other people, by contrast, though acknowledging that *karta* was no longer as 'strong' (*zami*) as it used to be, opined that it was still 'good for respect' – and in any case better than Evangelicalism, which they felt did not afford a great deal of respect.

This discourse about *karta* and its link to respect raises two questions, which I would like to address in this chapter. First, in what exact sense is (or was) *karta* 'good for respect'? Second, if *karta* is (or was) good for respect, and if respect is something people value, then

⁷ Amharic for 'world', this term was first introduced by Evangelicals to designate 'unbelievers'. Today '*alem*' is also used as a self-designation by those who follow *karta*, and I will therefore refer to them by this term.

why have so many people opted to leave *karta* in recent years or failed to return to it? My analysis of these questions will help us get a sense of what Dell people understand by respect and what role this value has traditionally played in their lives. It also offers first insights into the processes that stand behind the perceived decline of respect.

Approach and Argument

In present-day Dell, *karta* is a cultural formation in which about 30% of the population participate. Prior to the rise of Evangelicalism and Orthodoxy, however, *karta* was everyone's shared way of life. This raises the question whether I here intend to look at *karta* as it is currently practised, or whether I want to describe *karta* as it used to be in the past. This question is a slightly tricky one. On the one hand, it would betray my ethnography were I only to write about *karta* as a thing by-gone – after all, *karta* remains a meaningful part of the lives of a third of the population. On the other hand, *karta* has clearly seen a number of changes over the past decades. This is evident not only on an analytical level. Dell people themselves displayed a keen sense of *karta*'s historicity and frequently talked about ways in which it had changed. It is therefore conceivable that the answer to the question why *karta* might be 'good for respect' would be different if one looked at past instantiations of *karta* rather than at its current form.

To decide what is the right approach to *karta*, it is helpful to be more specific about the kind of change *karta* has undergone. To get at this, I have collected extensive data on changes in the various institutions that constitute this cultural formation. There is also some historical ethnography on Baaka and neighbouring Aari groups (Jensen 1959, Haberland 1959, Naty 1992, Gebre 1995). This material reveals two broad lines of change. First, a number of institutions are no longer practised or on the verge of disappearing. For instance, until the early 2000s, young people met for night dances (*belart*) during the dry season, but this is no longer done today. Similarly, while during the 1990s many people participated in feasting groups (*siri*), in 2016 there was only one such group left. Second, the complexity and costliness of many institutions has been reduced. *Karta* funerals, for instance, today involve much less ritual destruction of wealth than in the past, and lineage rituals are less elaborate. It is this disappearance or simplification of certain *karta* institutions – alongside the fact that fewer people participate in *karta* – which accounts for Dell people's sense that *karta* has 'cooled down' and is less 'strong' today than it used to be. At the same time, the

basic ways in which *karta* affords respect have not changed. Whether one looks at past instantiations of *karta* or at its current form, respect throughout appears as a key value which structures the activities in this cultural formation – only that the formation itself has overall become less complex.⁸ In other words, the answer to why *karta* might be ‘good for respect’ does not greatly vary across time. Against this background, I have decided to write about *karta* as I observed it during my fieldwork, adding information on changes where this matters for the question of how *karta* affords respect.

My starting point in this chapter are *karta* conceptions of social structure. Here we encounter an ideology of social hierarchy, which is based on the understanding that juniors need to show respect in order to receive seniors’ blessing. Blessings, in turn, are vitally important to enjoy good health and abundance, and so respect in *karta* appears as directly tied to the reproduction of life. In a second step, I show that the various practices and institutions constituting *karta* are geared toward respect. My starting point here is a discussion of *karta* funerals and how these afford extensive realizations of *bonshmi*. Noting that kinship and commensality are key to achieving a good funeral, I go on to show that kinship and commensality are important in *karta* more generally, and that both are central to realizing respect. I end this first part of the chapter with a conceptual account of what sort of respect specifically we are dealing with in the case of *bonshmi*. In the second part of the chapter, I look at the problem of *gomma*, which people cite as the key reason for leaving *karta*. I explain that in the local understanding, all suffering is the result of disrespecting seniors, but that often seniors push for respect so relentlessly that juniors end up acting disrespectfully. As a consequence there emerges a sense that *karta* is a system that – though good for respect – is also eminently dangerous and poses real obstacles to leading richly blessed, flourishing lives.

1.2 Why Karta is 'Good for Respect'

1.21 ‘I Can’t Lengthen Your Thumb By Pulling At It’ – Hierarchy and Respect

One of the more memorable lessons I received on *karta* understandings of social structure came some months into my first period of fieldwork. I was sitting in a bar in the main

⁸ Dena Freeman (2002: 81) offers a similar observation for a cognate cultural system in the Gamo Highlands. Writing about what she calls the Gamo ‘sacrificial system’, Freeman suggests that, ‘there has been no real transformation of the system... only a general weakening of it that can better be described as *devolution*. The system is rather less elaborated... but its general structure is still pretty much the same.’

village one afternoon, when a booming '*Ashamate!*' (Greetings!) sent a sudden wave of awe through the room. The voice belonged to a tall man wearing sandals and a black suit, who had just entered and whom I had not seen before. While the newcomer adjusted his eyes to the dim light, several men jumped to their feet and approached him in a crouching position. Some kissed his knees, while others remained at a little distance, repeatedly beating their chests with their fists. Medaybab, otherwise very boisterous, told me in a hushed voice that this was *God Worka* – '*God*' being the abbreviated form and honorary title of a *godmi* or ritual expert (and unrelated to the English '*God*'). Worka lived an hour away from the village and was the main *godmi* for Dell. He was ushered to the best available chair. Catching sight of me, he invited me to sit next to him.

Within a few minutes, a dozen or so bottles of beer accumulated on the rickety table in front of Worka since several men bought him one or two bottles each. One after the other, Worka then called these men to come and kneel before him. In each case, Worka grabbed a bottle, took a sip from it, sprayed saliva over its mouth, held it to the lips of the man, let him have a small sip, sprayed saliva over the bottle's mouth again, and finally handed it to the man to take it back to his place for consumption. I had also bought two bottles of beer for Worka, and so he eventually turned to me. But rather than bless me in the way he had blessed the others – for this was what he had been doing – he decided to impart a lesson to me. Taking hold of my left hand and extending it so that the palm faced upward, he pointed to the middle finger and said that this was the *babi* (ritual king). The index finger he declared to be a *godmi*. The slightly shorter ring finger, in turn, was a *toidi* (lineage head), the small finger a *kanni* (younger brother), and the thumb a *manna* (a person belonging to the marginalized, caste-like minority of craftworkers). Then he suddenly and forcefully pulled at my thumb until I winced with pain. 'You see', he said gleefully, 'I can't lengthen your thumb by pulling at it.' Similarly, he went on to explain, no one can turn a 'below person' (*tamabab*) like a *manna* into an 'above person' (*zermabab*) like a *babi* – 'not even the ferenji (white people) with all their technology can do that, because this is how *berri* (God) has created the world.'

Worka here enunciates an ideology of social hierarchy widespread across highland southwestern Ethiopia (cf. Donham 1999: 60-63 for Maale; Dori 2011: 20-26 for Oyda; Haberland 1993: 126ff. for Dizi; Freeman 2002: 66-71 for Gamo). In this ideology, society is represented as a hierarchy of statuses. In the case of Aari, the figure at the top is referred

to as *babi*. Literally meaning ‘father’, the term is commonly glossed as ‘ritual king’ (Naty 1992: 328). The *babi* is followed by a group of ritual experts or *godmi*, each of whom is responsible for a particular geographical region. Below these ritual leaders are the *keys* (commoners), who subdivide into *xantsa* and *manna*. *Xantsa* – who form the majority – are commonly described as farmers and *manna* as craftworkers, but many *manna* have long also carried out some farming. According to traditional ideology, *xantsa* rank above *manna*. To this day, the two groups are largely endogamous, and restrictions on commensality have been loosened only among Evangelicals, but continue to be upheld by *alem* and local Orthodox Christians.⁹

Importantly, hierarchy exists not only between these broad social groupings but also among kin. A given person ranks ‘down below’ (*shosh tama*) those who are classified as their father (*babi*), mother (*indi*), uncle (*irki*), older sister (*mitshi*), older brother (*ishmi*), or grandparent (*aka*) (see Figure 3). In turn, a person ranks ‘up above’ (*pes zerma*) everyone who is classified as their child (*jintsi*), younger brother (*kanni*), younger sister (*inani*) or nephew (*aaksi*).¹⁰ Every person then is senior to some people, and junior to others.

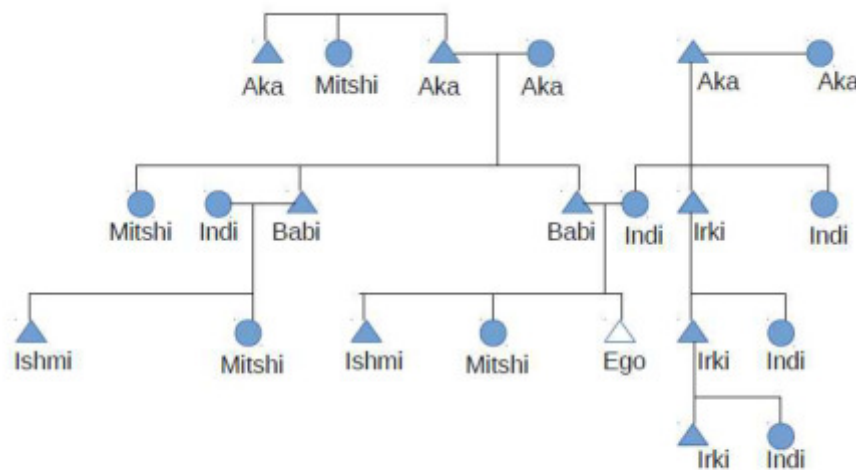


Figure 3. Aari kinship terminology (showing ego's seniors)

9 *Manna* further subdivide into *animan* (who are known as wood-workers and also play an important ritual role for *xantsa*) and *pekaman* (who are blacksmiths). *Animan* rank above *pekaman* and the two groups do not intermarry or eat together (see Freeman and Pankhurst 2003 on marginalized minorities in Ethiopia more generally).

10 There is also hierarchy between affines, with wife-givers ranking above wife-receivers. This hierarchy is clearest between a man and his wife's parents (*baisi*). At the level of the parent generation, hierarchy can become blurred since lineages often exchange brides both ways. Relations between brothers- and sisters-in-law (*wotni*) are conceived as egalitarian (*yekka*).

What is this ideology of hierarchy based on? In what sense is someone ‘below’ their mother or ‘above’ their younger siblings? Here we come to one of the most important and central notions of *karta*, which I heard asserted innumerable times: Those above have the power to bless (*anzken*) those below, who vitally depend on these blessings. To receive seniors’ blessing is a necessary condition for well-being: one’s own health depends on it, and so does the health of one’s children, the multiplication of one’s livestock and the growth of one’s crops. In order to be blessed by seniors one has to show them respect (*bonshmi*). By contrast, treating seniors disrespectfully – ‘belittling’ them (*toksi*) – leads one to experience *gomma*, a state marked by illness, death and misfortune.¹¹

Indeed, what had brought Worka to this part of Dell that day was just such a case of *gomma*. Kunko, the first son of a respected elder, was dangerously ill with high fever. A week earlier, Kunko’s mother had died a sudden and unexpected death. Having been *amain* for several years, Kunkinda was buried according to the evangelical way. Among other things, this meant that no sheep or cattle had been sacrificed for her since the church rejects sacrifice as ‘spilling blood for Satan’. In Worka’s opinion, however, this had been a dangerous mistake. As first son, Kunko (who is *alem*) ought to have sacrificed a sheep nonetheless. His failure to perform this requisite act of *bonshmi* had angered his mother, and hence she was ‘calling him from the grave [to follow her into it]’. Worka’s advice therefore was that Kunko sacrifice a sheep at his mother’s grave, fall on his knees and apologize for having ‘belittled’ her. This, Worka assured, would appease Kunkinda and make her send Kunko ‘coolness’.

As Worka’s advice reveals, respect is not only necessary to avoid suffering in the first place, but is also what it takes to overcome suffering when one has been hit by *gomma*. In the words of a local saying, ‘respect is the medicine for everything’ (*bonshmi rej mullite desha*).

So what do acts of respect and blessing look like in practice? The scene with Worka offers first impressions. To begin with, it features a number of acts people in Dell would describe as *bonshmi*. These include crouching or kneeling before someone, kissing their knee, beating one’s chest, using honorific titles of address, offering a good seat, buying drinks, not drinking before the other has not drunk, and displaying an attitude of obedience, submissiveness and fearfulness (*bashi*). These and other forms of showing respect are used

11 The relation ‘respect ↔ blessings’ is found throughout Ethiopia, in the traditional cultures of the South no less than in Orthodox Christianity, evangelical Christianity or Islam (cf. Dulin 2016: 94ff.).

not only in interactions with ritual experts like Worka. Much more importantly in everyday life, they are also used in relation to senior kin. Thus, running into your older sister, for instance, you would address her as '*amtsha*', which is an honorific kinship title (she greets by using your first name), and you would slightly bend your knees and kiss her on the mouth from below.

Note how these acts of respect make hierarchy visible. Crouching, I appear 'below' the other. Waiting for them to start drinking, I exhibit that I come 'behind' or 'after' (*bur*) them. There also is a symbolism here of being owned. To kiss someone's knee is a visible acknowledgement that one is 'below their leg/foot' (*dutite goir*), a common local expression for ownership. And to beat one's chest, I was told, shows that one's life is in the other's hands. Indeed, when beating their chest people often exclaim 'shall I not die below?' (*shosh deyayto*), 'kill me!' (*deys 'ime*), and this too is classified as an expression of respect.

Worka reciprocates the respect people show him by letting them have a sip from a bottle over the mouth of which he has sprayed saliva. Spraying of saliva – onomatopoeically described as *t'uph* – and 'making drink' (*wotshi*) are two paradigmatic ways of blessing; they are found across southern Ethiopia (e.g. Eppele 2006: 72, Lydall and Strecker 1979: 118f.). In Dell both are understood to produce *shimma*, a state of 'coolness' or absence of problems, which a friend once likened to the pleasant sensation of 'resting in the shade of a large tree on a warm day'. Both forms of blessing appear in numerous contexts. Most rituals at some point involve 'drinking water' (or beer or coffee). For instance, in the sort of *lineage* ritual Esias described in the introduction to this chapter, people first confess and resolve their conflicts, and then – in order of hierarchical precedence – kneel before the lineage head and take a few sips from a half-calabash (*shorxa*) that he holds out to them. This clears away any 'heat' that the conflict resolution may have failed to extinguish from their stomachs (the seat of the feelings) and ushers in a state of coolness and blessing. Spraying of saliva, in turn, is often associated with greeting. Thus, I repeatedly observed how Kalibab affectionately sprayed saliva over the head of a nephew or niece, who had shyly come up to kiss his knee. By the same logic, Mangeshinda one day lifted her shirt at the shoulders, spat under it, and massaged her breasts the way breast-feeding mothers do to stimulate the flow of milk. Her married son Mangesha had sent her a gift of meat, and by 'saying *t'uph*' and 'taking him to the breast' (*ami jedi*), Mangeshinda explained to me, she was answering his act of *bonshmi* by extending her blessing to him. The form of these acts

illustrates the ideological tenet that blessings flow from high to low, and that they are only obtained in return for respect. I need to crouch before I am able to drink from the calabash a senior holds to my lips. I cannot have saliva sprayed over my head, unless I bend forward.



Figure 4. During a lineage ritual a boy drinks from a *shorxa* held by his *toidi*.

The Value of Hierarchy

In recent years, anthropology has seen a reappraisal of hierarchy (Ferguson 2013, Piliavsky 2014, Peacock 2015, Haynes and Hickel 2018). Previously dismissive of hierarchy for both political and intellectual reasons (cf. Haynes and Hickel 2018: 5-8), anthropologists are now starting to take due account of the positive value that hierarchical relations have for many people. Thus, scholars have shown that hierarchy may be valued as the basis for achieving

fruition (Hickel 2015), as a means to achieve progress through connection to others (Haynes 2017), or as the basis for politics (Ansell 2014; Piliavsky 2014).

As the preceding section has suggested, in Dell, too, hierarchy has traditionally been valued, namely for affording both blessings and respect. This observation, however, leads on to the question which of these latter two values is the more important one in *karta*. Is hierarchy here primarily valued for affording blessings or for affording respect? As we shall see in the following, respect in *karta* clearly ranks above blessings. This is so inasmuch as *karta* institutions invite people to use blessings for the pursuit of respect: one gets health and wealth by being respectful, and these blessings are in turn used to create the relations and occasions through which respect is realized.

1.22 The Institutional Foundations of Respect

So far we have identified one answer to the question why *karta* might be ‘good for respect’: To enjoy good health and abundance people need to show *bonshmi* to their seniors, and thus the very reproduction of life is tied to respect. A second answer is that the various institutions which constitute *karta* – from modes of agricultural production to life-cycle rituals to ways of dealing with conflict – are all geared toward respect. Lacking the space to demonstrate this for all of these institutions, I will focus on one example. Funerals make for a particularly good example because they are of central importance in *karta* and reveal what matters in this cultural formation at large. Consider here the funeral of Betsinda and how it points us to the broader importance of kinship and commensality for realizing respect.

Betsinda's Funeral

Early one Monday morning in January 2017, I am woken by long drawn-out wailing. A few moments later, Kalibab knocks at my door and tells me with a stern and determined look that Betsinda, a woman in her late 40s, has died, and that we need to leave immediately to condole (*alxshken*). Kalibab's first wife, Kalinda, who is the older sister of Betsinda's husband, Betsibab, heads our group. There is her and Kalibab's two other wives, and two of Kalinda's daughters-in-law; there follow Kalibab and four of his sons and myself. Single file and at a good pace, we walk through dewy meadows, a bright sun rising in our backs. As we near Betsibab's compound, the wailing intensifies. Now the women of our group start wailing, too, and soon we traverse the shadowy and leafy *arxemi* grove that encircles the

compound. The space between the huts is densely packed with people, and so intense is the grief and the wailing and so abundant the flow of tears, that one can only join in the moment one steps into this cauldron of sorrow. Lacking the extensive knowledge of the dead woman's kinship network, which is crucial for condoling, I stay right behind Kalibab and do as he does. With precision Kalibab moves through the crowd, seeking out in quick succession the many dozens of people who are brothers or sisters, children or parents to Betsinda, and whom it is so essential to condole lest they feel that one has not shown them proper respect in this moment of loss and despair.

Before long, things take on a more business-like feel. The funeral has been set for Thursday, and much remains to be done before then. There is fire-wood to be collected and grain to be ground, food to be cooked and beer to be brewed; and these tasks are taken over by women. Meanwhile, men erect sun shelters for people to sit under, build a coffin, and remove a small hut from the centre of the compound to make room for dancing. Seven men, who are neither members of the same moiety as Betsibab nor affines are selected as *duki ed* or 'burial people'.¹² Their tasks include digging the grave, carrying the coffin, and, after the funeral, dividing up Betsinda's belongings among those who inherit. The preparations for the funeral involve a great number of people, many of them relatives, but also unrelated neighbours. There is a strong spirit of co-operation and trying to be helpful.

On Wednesday afternoon, one day before the funeral, Guo's hour has come. Short, wiry, and always with a whimsical smile, Guo is a *manna* in his sixties, who regularly carries out ritual work for Oni lineage, the lineage to which Betsibab belongs. So far, Guo has guarded the dead body of Betsinda from mice and ants, but now he initiates the ritual activities that lead up to the funeral. In hierarchical order, he binds *shala*-headbands (made from strips of dried *arxemi* leaves) around the heads of senior Oni men. He then asks for a spear to be brought and for an *anno-gadab* – 'a person who calls her "mother"' – to come forward. Kari is the genealogically highest ranking *alem* Oni man from the generation below Betsinda – and so it is his task to sacrifice sheep for her. Guo tells Kari to perform the sacrifice right next to the hut in which Betsinda is stored 'so that she may see', and 'so that she can drink the blood [of the sheep]', which is not collected but left to flow away. When the sheep has expired, its intestines are removed and placed on an upturned wooden bowl. Quickly, a small crowd gathers around the elders who read the intestines to discover 'what

12 There are two exogamous moieties, *indi* and *ashenda*. Evangelicals do not recognize this division, but for *alem* it remains relevant, both with regard to marriage and in the context of ritual life.

killed her’ and whether there are any ‘problems for her children’. A little later, Kari spears a cow and again intestines are read. Parts of the meat go to the *duki ed* as reward for their labour, parts go to Guo, and the rest is for Betsibab, who uses his share of meat to feast important guests.

On Thursday afternoon, I am in Kalibab’s compound. There is a group of about 25 people, composed of Kalibab’s kin from Amen lineage, and of neighbours from Wotsha and Zi (lineages that belong to the same moiety as Oni). We eat together, and then we head to the funeral. Kalibab, due to having married Betsibab’s sister, is *baisi* (affine) to Oni lineage. It is on this basis that he has invited his kin and neighbours to ‘walk in his back’ (*raxik muk*) to the funeral. When we are still at a little distance from Betsibab’s compound someone thinks to understand from the noise that the coffin has already left the hut and that the burial is immanent. Kalibab’s first son, Kali, dashes off, a rolled-up sheet of tin roof in one hand and white blankets and a 6 litre jerrycan with *arake* (liquor) in the other. These gifts need to be handed over before the burial, otherwise there is a risk of *gomma* – and for Kali, in particular, this is an issue, since as Kalinda’s son, the Oni people are his ‘uncles’ and ‘mothers’ and thus to be respected at all costs.

But when we arrive, it becomes clear that the coffin is not out yet. The crowd is boiling though. There are at least five or six groups like ours, each centred around one affine. Each dances as a tight throng, and people brandish spears and slam shields, blow horns and chant. The group of the ‘first affine’ or *wotti bais* – the man who has married Betsinda’s eldest daughter – launches an attack against the bamboo fence that surrounds the hut with the coffin. But it is only several attacks later, and after receiving a jerrycan with *arake* from Oni, that he finally tears down the fence. It is growing dark quickly now and the atmosphere is near its fever pitch. There is a crowd of some 300 or more people, and there is intense wailing and erratic gun fire. The coffin is paraded back and forth through the compound three times and finally the *duki ed* move toward the grave and everyone follows them in one dense swarm.

Later, under a bright moon, our group sits down in the shade of a tree and Kalibab’s wives hand around bowls with food. Two Oni men come to reciprocate Kalibab’s gift of *arake* by giving a slightly smaller amount of *arake* in return, and Kalibab then has the liquor distributed among his ‘followers’. There is some more dancing afterwards, but since

‘Betsinda didn’t get very old’, the dancing soon stops and wrapped in blankets our group lies down to sleep in the chilly night.

It had been a fine funeral, people agreed afterwards. Of course, it would have been even grander had Betsinda been a bit older. Her daughter’s sons would have grown up and would have provided further sheep for sacrifice. There would also have been more affines since her two teenage daughters would have been married. And dancing would have lasted longer. But her husband’s lineage was very large, and this alone meant that a seizable crowd had attended the funeral. And then there was a good number of affines after all. There had even arrived a group of affines from the low-lands, and these people had helped to ‘heat up’ (*oysh*) the funeral, because they just did not care if the government said you were not supposed to fire guns. Betsinda had also done well to die at this time of the year, when there was a lot of grain. And while not everyone had managed to prepare beer in time, there still was a good deal of drink and food. All this had combined to produce a descent bedlam, worthy of someone who ‘had given birth’.

The Value of Kinship

In the next chapter we will see that *amain* funerals take a very different and much less exuberant form, and that this has to do with Evangelicals’ pervasive concern to avoid sin. But for *alem* and Orthodox people in Dell, to be buried in a grand funeral of the kind just described – to be honoured with a final grand display of respect – was a key aspiration (see Dulin 2016: 181 for similar observations from northern Ethiopia). Indeed, I hardly ever saw people get more excited than when picturing their own funeral. ‘When I die, people will come like flies’, Kalibab told me one day, giddy with excitement:

‘From Oni they come. From Zi [lineage] everyone comes. Berr [lineage] comes. Down from the low-lands many people will come... From here to that tree over there, [the space] will fill up with people. They will say *woaaah*, *woaaah* ... My sons bring sheep, nephews bring sheep, my daughters’ sons bring sheep. I greet them through the intestines, ‘*abetto*, *abetto!*’ [hello] I say.’

Kalibab’s statement, no less than my description of Betsinda’s funeral, reveals kinship or relatedness¹³ as the crucial factor to achieve a great funeral. The index or ‘quali-sign’ (Munn

13 In this thesis I include under ‘kin’ both consanguineal and affinal (as well as fictive) kin. I am aware that anthropologists often treat affines and kin as two distinct categories, rather than to treat affines as a sub-type of kin. If I use ‘kin’ as an overarching category, this is – apart from being a useful shorthand – because Dell people themselves include consanguineal, affinal and fictive kin under one and the same term: *sosa*. (Though they also have more specific terms, such as ‘*baisi*’ for affines.)

1986: 17) of a great funeral – and thus of a life well lived – is a tremendous uproar, onomatopoeically described as ‘woaaaah’. And it is primarily on the basis of kinship that people come to your funeral and perform the various acts which together create this uproar. The loudest and most heartbreaking wailing is that of daughters and sisters. *Beli* (‘fictive kin’, see below) chant in praise of the dead person. Male descendants provide sheep. Nephews brandish guns while paraded on other people’s shoulders. Tumultuously, the first affine destroys the fence protecting the coffin. Affines dance, blow horns, and chant.

Indeed, of all kin, affines are perhaps the most important for a funeral. This is because from each affinally related lineage, one man will call together a group of people to ‘walk in his back’ to the funeral. For this man, it is crucial that his group be as big as possible because his reputation (*nami*) is tied to its size. My neighbour Agero once imitated what he feared others would say about him were he to fail at uniting a sufficiently large group for an upcoming funeral: ‘Oy! What’s that?! He didn’t treat his affine with respect. Is there nothing [to eat] in his house? No, he has some grain. So he must be stingy (*disha*) or what? What sort of affine is that. Tsa!’ Agero here reveals the understanding that it is a matter of respect for the kin of the dead person to turn up with a large group, and that one would otherwise lose reputation. Contrarily, one gains reputation if one manages to unite a sizeable group, and if it exalts the dead person by dancing a lot and making a great deal of noise. Hence, affines have a personal interest in bringing many people to the funeral and they thus contribute significantly to its overall size.

Kin, then, – their number and type – are key to funerals. This invites a particular kind of activity in life: To attain a great funeral one needs to strive to have many kin. Of course, to some extent, the number of someone’s kin is beyond their control. One is born into a large or a small lineage, one is elder sibling or *dokka* (last child), one has many sisters (and thus nephews) or few. Also, there is a natural up-ward movement over the life-course: As one’s siblings have children, as a new generation comes into being ‘below’, one automatically becomes ‘father’ or ‘mother’ or ‘uncle’ to others. But there are also ways to *actively* expand kinship, and my data suggest that people in Dell until recently invested a great deal of wealth and energy into this. This has changed with the rise of development. There are now competing uses of wealth, and people invest relatively less into kinship than previously. Yet, the relations created in the past persist into the present. If we look at the

relational networks of older people in Dell, i.e. of those who lived the greatest part of their lives in pre-development times, the following lines of striving can be discerned.

To begin with, men aspired to have several wives. Marriage requires paying bridewealth, and a father only pays bridewealth for his son's first wife. While not everyone could afford further marriages, a majority of the men who today are in their fifties or older have at least two wives, and several have three or four. Wives were important for both their labour and their gestational power. Indeed, to have numerous offspring was a key goal not only for men but also for women. Many of the older women in Dell have borne eight to twelve children; though many have also lost a considerable number of these. The value of children was manifold and included their labour power and the care and support they would provide in old age (see Noguchi 2013 on ageing among the Aari; Donham 1990: 111 on the value of children in Maale). What stands out from people's accounts about the value of children, however, is the respect they afforded. Women would highlight, for example, how their married sons would send them gifts of grain at harvest time, or how they would invite them whenever there was meat in their homes; and these were above all considered as expressions of *bonshmi*. Or take Kalinda. One day, upon learning that many women in my country have only one or two children, Kalinda exclaimed emphatically, 'But to give birth is nothing bad! It's something very good. It means great respect. Your son-in-law (*baisi*) will show you a lot of *bonshmi*.' Significantly, Kalinda here makes a direct transition from talking about children to talking about affines. For her, children are sources of respect also in the indirect sense that you get affines through them, and affines – especially sons-in-law – mean respect.

Indeed, next to aspiring to have a great number of children, people in Dell have traditionally placed high value on affinity – and the more children you have, of course, the more affines you can get. The concern with increasing the number of one's affines also became evident in how people reasoned about good and bad marriages. In an interview on this topic Kalibab explained:

'The people of Berr [lineage] are our affines, aren't they? Now, for example, if Ambi [Kalibab's teenage daughter] marries someone from Berr – ay, that's useless! Look, it doesn't add affines on top of our affines. But if she marries into Boca, for example, that's good. I would like it if I became affines with Boca. If there's a funeral in their house [lineage] we go, if there's a funeral in our house they come.'

As with children, the value of affines is not limited to respect. Thus, Kalibab on another occasion explained how marrying Kalinda had been a good move because her natal lineage, Oni, is the largest lineage in the area, and as his affines the Oni people would all come to help him if ever he got in trouble. Yet, while people sometimes mentioned security or economic benefits, the value of affinity was above all discussed in terms of *bonshmi*. Affines were people whom you might not see all the time, but who showed you lavish hospitality when you did pass through their land. It was through affines that funerals got noisy. Indeed, more practical forms of help that affines might grant – such as providing access to grazing land – tended to be framed as demonstrations of *bonshmi*, too. And so its affordance of respect has traditionally been a key motivation for working to expand affinity.

The value placed on kinship, finally, also becomes visible in a range of *karta* institutions for creating ‘fictive kinship’ and the wealth people formerly invested in these institutions. As Medaybab told me, ‘in the past, when people got some money, they thought “on top of my kin, I will buy kin” (*inte sosate zen sosa shendite*).’ He went on to explain how you could, for instance, become *beli* with someone by exchanging cattle or sheep and feasting together, and he noted with pride that he had six such *beli*. Scholars working in neighbouring societies, have commonly glossed ‘*beli*’ as ‘bondfriend’ (e.g. Girke 2010). But it is important to note that in Dell at least, people conceive of this relation in terms of kinship (*sosemi*) rather than friendship (*gohdemi*). Not only would they describe their *beli* as ‘brother-like’ or ‘sister-like’ (women create *beli* relations, too). But they also said that if one treated *beli* with disrespect, this could become *gomma* for one’s children. *Gomma*, however, is explicitly understood to only occur among kin.

Next to making *beli*, you could, in the context of *mol’a* work groups or *belart* dance groups, become ‘affines’ with a person of the opposite sex. As in the case of *beli*, this went through reciprocal exchange: the woman prepared beer and food, which she and her ‘affine’ consumed during the group’s yearly feast, and the man would reciprocate with things like a self-made palm leave mat, a hand-carved stool, or money. From that time onwards they would greet each other respectfully as ‘*baisi*’ and treat each other with the same respect as ‘real’ affines do. All in all, then, the creation of different forms of kinship has traditionally been a key concern for people in Dell, and *karta* features numerous institutions to do so – from polygyny to fictive affinity. Given my earlier discussion of ideas about social hierarchy and the respect people can expect from juniors, it is clear that an expansion of kinship, and

specifically the creation of people ‘down below’, means an increase in the respect one can command. *Karta* invites this kind of striving – not least because a good funeral is a loud one, and it is kin who make the noise.

Cultivating Respect through Commensality

Next to the role played by kinship, a second conspicuous feature of the above described funeral is commensality. A few hours after Betsinda’s death, women start to prepare food. In the days leading up to the funeral and in the week after it, there is a steady stream of visitors, who spend some hours sitting together with the close kin. At regular intervals, everyone is served coffee and boiled maize, and once the beer has been brewed, there is always a calabash that circulates among the guests. Meanwhile, food and beer is being prepared in the houses of those who are *baisi* and who have invited others to follow them to the funeral. As I have explained above, it is important for the *baisi* to unite a large group, since his ‘name’ depends on this. To be able to invite many people, one has to be able to offer them food. For if one failed to do so, they would complain and gossip: ‘If there’s no food in his house, then why did he call us?!’ Indeed, preparing a lot of food is not just necessary to be able to invite many people in the first place. It is also necessary to, as it were, keep them going during the funeral. It is important for one’s group to dance a lot and to make a great deal of noise. This both shows one’s respect for the dead person and their kin and it gains one the admiration of onlookers. The group’s boisterousness, however, depends on it being well-fed and getting a good measure of alcohol.

All this commensality is closely bound up with *bonshmi*. To serve guests coffee and maize, or, as a *baisi*, to feed one’s followers, is understood as a demonstration of respect. And those who are thus fed, in turn contribute to the great uproar which marks the death of a respected person. Food also mediates respect in numerous other ways during the funeral. Sacrificing animals is a requisite form of showing respect to the dead person. At the same time it makes available meat, and while parts of the meat are given as a payment to the *manna* and the *duki ed*, other parts are used by Betsibab to show special respect to important visitors. Note also how the actual burial of Betsinda can only take place after the *wotti bais* has destroyed the fence around her hut, and how he only destroys it after the Oni people have shown him respect by giving *arake*.

As with kinship: the prominent place commensality occupies in the funeral reflects something about its place in *karta* more generally. Whether you look at life-cycle or lineage rituals, at conflict resolution or modes of creating fictive kinship, at production institutions like *dabba* work parties or at leisure institutions like *siri* feasting groups – eating together is at the heart of *karta*. This makes *karta* markedly different from Dell Evangelicalism: as we will see in the next chapter, evangelical institutions involve considerably less commensality, and evangelical ideology explicitly devalues ‘just eating’. At the same time, those who still follow *karta* now invest relatively less into commensality than they did in the past. This is because of the pursuit of economic development, which makes competing demands on everyone’s resources (cf. Chapter 3). As I have mentioned above, several *karta* institutions have been dropped or down-sized, and this has mostly occurred with regard to the aim of ‘saving’. Similarly, everyday commensality among neighbours and kin, like visiting each other at meal times, has, on my interlocutors’ account, been reduced. As we saw in the opening vignette of this thesis, this is something they lament and cite as evidence for the decline of respect. Against this background, it is essential to understand the role commensality has traditionally played in Dell. Here are three observations on how commensality mediates respect.

(1) *Commensality presupposes and thus helps to produce social harmony.* In Dell, as elsewhere in southern Ethiopia, it is thought that people should not eat together if there is a conflict between them; and it is fitting to note that a common way to express that one has become angry with someone, is to say ‘my stomach has become sad’ (*norti ist aterte*). If one eats together despite a ‘sad stomach’, this can lead to illness or worse. One time during my fieldwork, several members of a neighbouring household fell ill with diarrhoea and vomiting after attending a social event where they had eaten food prepared by Oni women. For those to whom I spoke about this, there was no doubt that this was because their household head, Haikobab, was in a land-conflict with Eaybab, whose wives had prepared the food. Indeed, Haikobab and Eaybab had sued each other in a customary court operated by *God Worka*, where they had ‘placed words [curses]’ against each other. This marks an advanced level of enmity, and Haikobab correspondingly did not attend the event at Eaybab’s house. But his wives and children did – falling ill afterwards.

As this case shows, people will not always refrain from eating together if they or those ‘above’ them are at conflict with someone. This can have various reasons, from

thinking they are without blame and thus not prone to suffer harm, to simply considering the conflict as not particularly grave and hence nothing to worry about. Members of the same household face the added difficulty that there will always be *some* tensions, but that it is hardly practical to hold a conflict resolution before every meal. (Though I did witness several instances when my host family delayed dinner because someone's 'stomach had become sad', and when the conflict was discussed and formal apologies extended before food was served; see p.116 for an example)

It makes good sense, then, that there are institutionalized moments in social life where people, when brought together for commensality, are compelled to voice and solve conflicts before they start eating together. Nowhere does this become more obvious than in the kind of lineage ritual (*ch'iltch'i*) described by Esias above. But the dynamics apparent in that case can be observed whenever sheep or cattle are slaughtered: during funerals, in feasting groups, at the annual feast of work groups, in the context of marriage and so on. For whenever livestock are slaughtered, their intestines are read. Just as the human stomach – which, remember, becomes sad at having been wronged – intestines are called '*norti*'. Indeed, the intestines of animals are thought to represent conflicts between people. Sadness in the human *norti*, in other words, manifests in the animal *norti*. While there is no space here to go into the details of reading intestines, we can briefly say that they are conceived as a map of social relations: they represent your 'house', affines, uncles, children, ancestors, neighbours, and people under 'different kings' (*babi galla*); irregularities, red spots, 'paths' that are present or absent indicate for specific relations that 'there's something to talk about', i.e. that there is *gomma*. Indeed, even before the animal is slaughtered, those who are to partake in the meal are asked to 'confess' (*buts*) their grievances, and this often leads to a first round of confessions and discussions. But the intestines in most cases will show that not all issues have been uncovered, and thus people are drawn into further discussions and confessions. Then another sheep is slaughtered to see if all conflicts have been resolved. Importantly, one cannot eat the meat – which everyone starts craving strongly at this point – before the intestines have 'cleared'. Thus people are effectively compelled to voice conflicts before they eat together. It is in this sense that commensality in presupposing social harmony helps to produce it. Given that most conflicts are framed in terms of disrespect, the solving of conflicts means nothing other than the reinstitution of a state of respect.



Figure 5. Reading intestines at a funeral

(2) *Commensality creates relations*. Food plays a crucial role in creating the different types of kinship discussed above. A baby only becomes a member of its father's lineage when, at the age of three or four months (depending on whether it is a girl or a boy), the lineage head takes it in his lap and feeds it with barley paste; this is known as *illa lasi* or 'making lick flour'. Affinity, in turn, is only fully established when the members of two lineages meet in the ritual site of the wife-givers, where, in a wooden feeding trough (*gonga*), they mix meat brought along by each side. It is by eating from 'one *gonga*' that

they become related. This echoes the understanding that people of the same lineage are ‘one *gonga*’ (*gonga wolax*); an expression which makes reference to the fact that during lineage rituals the lineage head hands out to his junior kin morsels of grilled liver that have been cut up in such a feeding trough. The role of eating together for creating relations, finally, is highly visible when it comes to fictive kinship, which is always established through feasting. The relation of *beli*, for instance, is created through three successive – and successively larger – feasts; the role that food and feeding plays between two *beli* is also expressed when, decades later, one of them wails at the other’s funeral, ‘Oh, *belio*, *belio*! I have eaten from your hand. Whose hand am I to eat from now?’

We can distinguish two ways in which commensality creates relations. First, there is the logic of the gift, which needs to be returned and thus creates relations. This is what happens when the lineage head feeds a new-born baby: in a sense the fed person will work their whole life to repay this gift (and its renewal in the form of blessings) by paying respect to the lineage head. Similarly, people on the way to establishing fictive kinship oblige each other through invitations that go back and forth between them. And on a less formal level the same things happens when neighbours invite each other in turn, whether to drink coffee together in the morning or for larger social events. Here it is not so much the act of eating or the food in itself which relates, but the act of inviting and hosting and the resultant obligations for the other to invite and host in return.¹⁴

It is true, however, that Dell people have traditionally also conceived of the very act of eating together – especially when it comes to meat – as creating kinship. This became evident in an interview with Gamibab. Talking about feasting groups, he explained:

‘We have come together in one house. We have slaughtered a sheep – that’s like [being of] one blood. We don’t abandon each other. We ate from the same plate, we all extended our hands to the same plate. We don’t quarrel – the sheep’s intestines would be angry with us [show *gomma*].’

14 A striking expression of this notion can also be found in *shishi*, memorial celebrations held some months after a funeral. At the outset of a *shishi*, a *manna* spills a small quantity of coffee, beer and cooked maize. This is understood to feed the *bunka* or spirits of the dead. It is thought that during the months after their death, dead people live on the hospitality of those who have died before them. However, if their living kin fail to reciprocate this hospitality after some months, the other *bunka* will get angry and will no longer feed the new-comer *bunka*. This forces the latter to ‘return to his kin’; but the return of the dead means death for the living. To securely relate the one who has recently died to the community of the dead, it is necessary to reciprocate the latter’s hospitality.

‘One blood’ is a synonym for kinship; and, as we know by now, the notion that the intestines will show *gomma* between the group members points to the assumption of kinship, too, since *gomma* only occurs among kin. One becomes kin by ingesting the same substance.

(3) *Commensality draws people into respectful interactions*. Take as an example here the interactions among the people of Kalibab’s group, when uniting in his house before heading off to the funeral. It is Thursday afternoon and slowly the guests start to arrive. Whenever someone comes through the door, there is a moment of gay and noisy greeting. ‘Older sister, *abo!*’, ‘Oysabab, *ashame!*’, people call out, using kinship titles or teknonyms, before they kiss the newcomer affectionately. The latter is then invited to sit down. Things to sit on are limited and of different symbolic value – from mats on the floor over smaller and bigger stools, to chairs with and without armrests. Often, someone who is junior to the newcomer will offer them their seat. This has a knock-on effect. If Ambi offers her (large) stool to her married older sister, (Ambi expects that) her younger sister Gogi jumps up to offer Ambi her (smaller) stool. This in turn has consequences for Gogi’s younger siblings, and so on until the youngest children get pushed out of the house altogether. When everyone has arrived, people are invited to wash hands. Gogi, holding a plastic bowl in her left hand and pouring water with the right, has to pass back and forth because Kali refrains to wash his hands before his father, Kalibab, has done so, but then the person who sits next to Kalibab is junior to Kali and insists that Kali should wash hands before them, and so on. Now food is served. As household head, Kalibab has the right to *dom*, i.e. to take the first bite, and so everyone waits respectfully until he has blessed the food and started eating. At the same time, it is understood that by having invited them and feeding them abundantly, Kalibab is showing his guests respect. During the funeral, they repay in kind: when the group dances and Kalibab steps into its centre brandishing a spear, everyone makes a great deal of noise and beats their chests with their fists, and this is great *bonshmi* for Kalibab.

In sum, this scene contains various expressions of respect, from greeting and offering seats, to deferring to others in matters like washing hands or starting to eat, to reverential forms of dancing. All of this could also have been observed by looking at any other instance of commensality. Whenever they unite for commensality people are drawn into this type of respectful interactions.

Commensality, then, does not only contribute to respect in the two senses discussed above. It does not only push people to avoid conflicts and restore harmony where it has been

disturbed; nor does it only create relations in which there are expectations of respect. Commensality is also linked to respect in the very immediate sense that it provides the most important context in social life where respectful interactions take place. Commensality helps to realize respect. Alongside kinship, with which it is interwoven, commensality is at the heart of the kind of social life that *karta* affords.

On 'Respect'

So far I have used 'respect' as a translation for '*bonshmi*' without having explaining this choice yet. Now that we have gained an ethnographic sense of what *bonshmi* means in Dell, I would like to spell out why 'respect' is an adequate translation and what sort of respect specifically we are dealing with here.

To begin with, let me explain why I speak of 'respect' rather than 'honour'. Honour would be an appropriate translation if used in the active sense of 'to honour someone'. However, in the anthropological literature, 'honour' mostly appears in the sense of 'personal honour' (cf. Stewart 1994). As such, honour is about moral worthiness – about particular qualities of a person's character or conduct, such as male virility and female modesty in the Mediterranean (Peristiany 1974), generosity, honesty and independence among Bedouin (Abu-Lughod 1986: 87) or military prowess in 19th century Yorubaland (Iliffe 2005: 67). *Bonshmi*, however, has nothing to do with personal qualities. Linguistically, it is nothing that one can 'have' or 'lose' or 'defend'. Rather, *bonshmi* is something that is *done* – that one receives from others or shows to them.

To make 'respect' work as a translation for '*bonshmi*' it is important to note philosophers' distinction between respect as attitude and as action (Dillon 2016). *Bonshmi* corresponds to the latter form: it is 'respect expressed in action'. People may feel respect for someone, but it is only when this attitude manifests in tangible actions that one can speak of '*bonshmi*'.

A second point concerns the bases on which people can receive *bonshmi*. Two bases should be distinguished. (1) *Seniority*. Speaking with philosopher Stephen Darwall (1977, 2009: 120f.), the respect people obtain on the basis of seniority is 'recognition respect'. The *bonshmi* shown to, say, an uncle or an older sister is independent of their merit (and thus does not constitute 'appraisal respect', cf. *ibid.*). It is granted simply due to recognizing them as a particular kind of person. One may further note that this recognition respect is

directional not *mutual*: it is only juniors who ‘respect’ seniors, whereas seniors ‘bless’ or ‘help’ juniors but do not ‘respect’ them (cf. Dulam 2006: 30 for similar observations from Mongolia). In the next chapter we will see that Dell Evangelicalism promotes a *mutual* form of recognition respect, where everyone is entitled to respect independent of their rank. (2) *Exchange*. Next to having rights to juniors’ respect, people can also work to receive *bonshmi* in a logic of exchange – giving respect to be respected in turn. This is what happens where people invite each other reciprocally to feasts or everyday commensality. It is also what we saw in the case of funerals, where an affine feeds a group of followers, who reciprocate by exalting him when he dances in their midst.

1.3 The Quest for Respect and the Problem of Suffering

The previous section has given us a sense of why people might want to describe *karta* as ‘good for respect’: it is a cultural formation in which respect is a key value, and to participate in *karta* affords rich opportunities to realize respect. But for all the respect it affords, *karta* has continuously lost followers since the 1990s. A definite part of the ‘decline of respect’, the withdrawal of two thirds of the population from *karta* requires an explanation. If *karta* is good for respect, and if respect is something people value, then why did they leave *karta* or fail to return to it?

When I asked Evangelicals and Orthodox Christians in Dell why they had left *karta*, their answers primarily turned around the problem of *gomma*: In most cases people said they had converted in response to suffering illness, the death of children or livestock, or some other calamity – problems they explained as the result of having disrespected a senior and thus having incurred their *gomma*. But apart from giving personal histories of suffering, many people also suggested in more general terms that ‘there’s a lot of *gomma* in *karta*’ (*karta gir gomma bedebeda*). I encountered a pervasive sense of *karta* being ‘dangerous’ (*darlaisaf*) or ‘problematic’ (*astshagari*). Importantly, this sense was also shared by those who still participated in *karta*. *Karta*, in other words, though being described as ‘good for respect’ was also seen to pose real obstacles when it came to accessing blessings and leading flourishing lives.

To understand people’s withdrawal from *karta*, then, we need to understand their sense of *karta* being ripe with *gomma*. To get at this, I analysed numerous past and present-day *gomma* cases with regard to the question what exactly people thought had caused

gomma in them. Below, I present one of these cases, which illustrates my two main findings. First, I found that in some cases people had been hit by *gomma* without having committed any conscious act of disrespect. I suggest that this can lead to a sense of *karta* posing an uncontrollable danger. Second, in many cases people did act disrespectfully before being hit by *gomma*. Crucially, however, they only acted that way after seniors had aggressively pushed them to show more respect. This kind of experience, I argue, gives people the sense that even if they try hard to be respectful, it is difficult to live up to seniors' ceaseless demands for respect – and easy to fall victim to their anger.

Kalinda's Ordeal

During my time in Dell, I spent many an evening by the fire in Kalinda's hut, chatting with her as she went about roasting coffee and preparing dinner. An exceedingly kind and warm-hearted woman, Kalinda was in her late 50s and had four adult sons and one teenage daughter. She first told me about what I later understood was the central story of her life when, one evening, our conversation came around to the topic of sons-in-law. With much regret, Kalinda noted that she did not have a son-in-law yet and from there went on – by way of explanation – to narrate her ordeal. But she also came back to this story on other occasions; and while I have retained the structure of her original account, I have added some details and clarifications obtained during those later conversations.

Kalinda married Kalibab in 1974. In the following years, she made some money by distilling *arake* and selling it at the market in Bako. When she had saved enough money, she asked Kalibab to buy her a cow. This cow gave birth to several calves. Somewhere in the mid-1980s, both this cow and her first daughter (which had grown up by that point) calved in the same week. Since *karta* prohibited women from milking, Kalibab milked the cows. He collected the milk in two separate calabashes. After two weeks, the calabashes had filled up, and Kalibab took them to Woissabab, who was the head of Amen lineage at that time. As *toidi* often do, Woissabab made Kalibab wait for a couple of days. But finally he called together the Amen men, and, after he had blessed the milk, they drank it together. Kalibab then started milking Kalinda's cows again, and again he collected their milk in two calabashes. In those days it was common to seek not only the *toidi's* blessing, but to also perform a *mora kxaid*. This meant inviting elders from the neighbourhood, who would bless the cow in return. By this point, Kalinda was getting somewhat anxious to finally drink

some of her cows' milk; she also wanted to make butter and sell it in the market. She did agree, however, that it would be good to get the neighbours' blessing – though she also asked Kalibab to only present one of the two calabashes to them, so that she could use the milk from the other to make butter once the elders had provided their blessing.

Then came the fateful day. Kalinda had been out in the fields weeding. When she returned in the afternoon, she heard voices from Kalibab's hut and went in to say hello. Entering the hut, she saw that Kalibab had not heeded her request, but had presented both of the calabashes to the elders. In a sudden rush of anger, Kalinda grabbed one of the calabashes and ran outside. She hid herself in the *arxemi* grove, fearing that Kalibab would come after her to beat her. But Kalibab never came.

Some two or three months later, Kalinda's first cow suddenly died. Assuming that Kalibab's anger was responsible, Kalinda asked him if he had 'become sad' about the episode with the milk. He denied that he had. But then the second cow died, and soon after three calves. This really was a massive loss for Kalinda, and seeing her cattle perish she made attempts to turn things around. Twice she sent mediators to Kalibab to enquire if he had not after all 'become sad', and to entreat him to state how she might apologize. Moreover, the intestines of the dead cows were read by a man from the neighbourhood. As Kalinda recalls, the dead cows, through their intestines – and through the man's mouth – spoke thus: 'We are like his [Kalibab's] granaries. But he curses us, so we go away.' (This makes reference to the then prevalent understanding that husbands are the real owners of their wives' property. The notion of granary indicates cattle as both a store of wealth and a source of food.) Despite all this, Kalibab continued to claim that he had nothing to do with Kalinda's troubles. He was soon to be given the lie.

In 1991, Mutsi, Kalinda's only daughter, who was around 13 years old at the time, fell ill and died after a couple of weeks. At her funeral, a sheep was sacrificed and the intestines read. Speaking through the intestines, Mutsi announced that 'father's shorts will be on mother's shoulders.' This must be understood against the background that in *karta* funerals close kin sometimes hold up clothes of the dead person while they dance. In other words, Mutsi foretold Kalibab's death. It was only at this point that Kalibab admitted to having indeed 'become sad' about the episode with the milk. Soon after, a ritual to 'cool down' his anger was carried out.

Asked about these events, Kalibab largely confirmed what Kalinda had told me, adding further details and explaining his own position. It was true, he said, that Kalinda had entreated him to only present one calabash to the neighbourhood elders. But then again it was not as if the elders were going to drink all of the milk. No, they would taste a little from each calabash, and then they would say ‘that’s enough for us. They have called us, they have shown us *bonshmi*. May their cows give birth, may there be a lot of milk in their house.’ That was why he did not follow Kalinda’s request. Now, when Kalinda snatched away one of the calabashes, Kalibab recalled, the elders had exclaimed, ‘Oy! What’s that?! She makes us appear as if we had come to gulp down her milk (*wom joymjoymde*). Bad, that’s very bad!’ In that moment, Kalibab had raised his eyes to the upper part of his hut’s centre post, and had muttered a curse: ‘May her bones [may she] remain, but may all her possessions perish!’ If he had subsequently kept quiet about his curse – rather than admit to it and give Kalinda the chance to apologize – it was because he had ‘wanted her to see’. ‘There was not a thing in her hands when she came from her relatives’, Kalibab explained, making reference to Kalinda’s lack of possessions when marrying him. ‘What she got, she got in my house, she got from my land.’

When Mutsi died, Kalibab came by, and the ritual to cool down his anger did lead Kalinda’s livestock to multiply again, she explained. Yet, her ordeal was not over yet. For in the following years, she suffered four miscarriages. ‘At that time, I was running from one diviner to the next’ Kalinda recalled her quest for healing. ‘They asked for many things – chickens, money, *arake*.’ For a long time it remained unclear what was causing her suffering. But finally it was established that this time her troubles were coming from her dead father. Years earlier, in a moment of mortal threat, she had implored his spirit for help. But then she had forgotten about it and had failed to make an offering to thank him for having protected her. So she took a sheep to the head of her father’s lineage. The sheep was sacrificed, and her father spoke through the intestines that he was satisfied and that he would send her coolness. But then Kalinda had a fifth miscarriage. This time she went to see Girano, the most powerful and expensive of diviners. Girano would hold well-attended seances at his house. Sitting behind a red curtain he would announce that there was a person in the room who had, say, stolen or committed adultery or polluted a sacred stream. Thereupon, or so it was hoped, some kind of force would ‘throw down’ (*jax*) to the floor the one who was guilty of the named transgression. This allowed them to become conscious of

their transgression and to subsequently go make up for it so as to be healed. But nothing ever threw down Kalinda.

It was around this time that Evangelicalism became locally known as a source of healing. And so one day, after yet another inconclusive seance at Girano's, Kalinda decided that she might as well try out this new religion. Before she went off to 'give her hand', she told her son Esias where she hid her money and to use that money for her funeral, should she not survive. But survive she did, and soon after she gave birth to a healthy daughter. Since that time, Kalinda has been *amain*.

Analysis

Kalinda left *karta* after a long period of suffering. We can summarize her understanding of the reasons of this suffering as follows: The decimation of her cattle and the death of her daughter resulted from her husband's *gomma*, whereas her miscarriages – at least the first four of them – resulted from her (dead) father's *gomma*. (She was uncertain what *gomma* stood behind the fifth miscarriage and explained that she never found out because it was 'simply done away with' [*gurri negshaxe*] by conversion to Evangelicalism.) On Kalinda's account, she incurred her husband's *gomma* by snatching away the calabash. Given what I have said about the importance of hosting and commensality, it will not come as a surprise that to forcefully take away food from guests is an extremely disrespectful act by local standards. But not only had she disrespected the guests and by doing so had cast a bad light on their host. She had also disrespected Kalibab in a very immediate sense. To snatch away the calabash was like questioning his position as household head and owner of all things 'under his foot'. It insinuated that she was 'above' her husband, but since in reality she was not, this belittled him. Her father's *gomma*, in turn, hit Kalinda because she failed to reciprocate his protection. This is about disrespect, too. The protection a dead father extends over his daughter is the same as a blessing, but blessings, as we know, are exchanged for respect. So to not answer a blessing is an act of disrespect. In both cases, then, Kalinda attributes her suffering to disrespecting her seniors.

To analyse Kalinda's case in more detail, I now propose to ask what led to her acts of disrespect. I raise this question for the cases of her father's and Kalibab's *gomma* respectively. Both of these analyses will lead on to more general insights on why Dell people conceive of *karta* as 'dangerous'.

(1) If we begin with Kalinda's father's *gomma*, it should be clear that there is no way to say that Kalinda consciously refused to thank him for his assistance, i.e. that hers was a *deliberate* act of disrespect. Indeed, in her own understanding it was precisely her lack of consciousness which complicated her quest for healing. As she recounted to me, several diviners had told her that there was surely something she had 'forgotten' (*wal*), urging her to try to remember. But hard as she tried, she just could not think of what she might have done wrong. It was only after a long time that it finally struck her that she had once implored her father while being choked by her co-wife in a fight. A diviner then confirmed that this must have caused *gomma* because while her father had evidently saved her, she had not repaid him. Here, then, it is only in retrospect, that a certain act – or, rather, omission to act – is identified as an act of disrespect.

This kind of retrospective 'discovery' of disrespect was apparent in several cases of *gomma* that I learnt about. Typically it occurred where someone had been suffering from illness or other afflictions for a long time. Why this should be so is easy to understand. As we know, in this system the precondition for healing is to discover one's wrongdoing and to seek forgiveness for it. When faced with suffering, people first think through their recent interactions. If they realize that a senior may have felt disrespected, they will make enquiries as to whether that was indeed the case and, if so, how they might apologize. However, if suffering does not subside (think of chronic illness, for instance), there comes a point where one has apologized to everyone who could possibly have caused one's problems. At this point, the quest for healing necessarily turns into a quest to uncover transgressions that one committed without any awareness, especially transgressions committed against entities other than living humans. Kalinda's case offers one example, with her dead father being evoked as the entity that felt disrespected. In another case, the explanation of a man's protracted illness was even more arcane: A diviner suggested that the illness was due to the man once having had sexual intercourse in a hut located near a granary in which there happened to be stored a spear that many years ago had been used by someone to kill several people in a particular forest further up in the mountains. In this case the *gomma* was thought to proceed from the (deceased) owner of that spear. Finally, there were also cases where someone's suffering was explained as the result not of their own transgressions but of the transgression of one of their ancestors.

I argue that these kinds of explanations are one source of people's sense of *karta* being 'dangerous'. Such *gomma* cases – whether personally experienced or witnessed – lead to a sense that one is not fully in control of one's well-being. One may try to be respectful at all times, and yet it is possible that one incurs *gomma*, for instance by violating a rule one was not even aware existed, or by being harmed due to the transgressions of someone who has been long dead.

(2) If in her father's case Kalinda's act of disrespect occurred unconsciously, in Kalibab's case she was aware from the beginning that she had acted with extreme disrespect. The act of snatching away food from guests was too extraordinary to go unnoticed. Her consciousness of this is indicated by her escape into the *arxemi* grove; it also shows when, upon her first cow's death, she immediately suspected that Kalibab's anger was behind this.

So why did Kalinda snatch away the calabash? Let us begin by noting that her act cannot be read as an expression of a general rejection of the cultural system she inhabited at that time. She certainly did not question the need to present new milk to the lineage head. To this day, everyone in Dell, whether *alem*, *amain* or Orthodox Christians firmly subscribes to the notion that the 'first' (*birra*) of things (milk, crops, lambs etc.) needs to be offered up, whether to the lineage head or the Christian God. Neither did Kalinda disagree that it would be good to get further blessings by inviting the neighbours, though she also asked Kalibab to offer only one calabash to them. It was when Kalibab blithely ignored this request, that Kalinda 'went crazy' (*bersaxe*), as she once put it.¹⁵ Seeing the two calabashes, we can assume, she experienced an acute sense of unfairness, a sense that Kalibab had gone too far.

To explain Kalinda's act, then, the real issue is to explain Kalibab's behaviour. Why did he simply pass over her request and present both calabashes? Two motives appear as likely. Firstly, by presenting both of the calabashes to the neighbourhood elders, Kalibab showed them greater respect than if he had only offered them one. Not only would this generosity have contributed to his good name (*nami*). It would also have meant for him to eventually be treated with lavish hospitality in return. In other words, Kalibab here used Kalinda's milk as part of his own project to build relations in which respect is exchanged reciprocally. A second conceivable motive is that Kalibab wanted to put Kalinda in her

¹⁵ To say that one 'went crazy' is an expression people in Dell use to deflect responsibility; it suggests that one acted impulsively, in the heat of the moment, rather than deliberately. At the same time, this phrasing acknowledges that one's act was wrong. At least in her retrospective rendering of the case, then, Kalinda does not blame Kalibab. It was her who did wrong not him.

place. Not budging an inch in *karta* is part of the work that goes into reproducing social hierarchy and thus securing respect. It is by showing juniors that one does not have to heed their requests that one reminds them of who is ‘above’ and who is ‘below’. While we cannot, of course, be entirely sure that this motive was at play when Kalibab presented the two calabashes, it is clearly at play when he later denied to have cursed Kalinda. As he himself explains, by making it impossible for Kalinda to seek his forgiveness – and to thus overcome her affliction – he ‘wanted her to see’. That is, he wanted to teach her a lesson about her fundamental dependence on him, to make her see with painful clarity the consequences of disrespect.

Kalibab’s refusal to forgive as much as his decision to use the whole of Kalinda’s milk despite knowing that this would make her unhappy is far from idiosyncratic. Rather, it conforms to a pervasive cultural logic by which people in *karta* seek to take or withhold things from juniors in order to further their own project of getting respect. At the same time, it is not uncommon that this kind of behaviour eventually leads juniors to react defiantly – and that such acts of defiance are later, in moments of suffering, identified as having triggered *gomma*. This kind of dynamic was apparent in several of the *gomma* cases I analysed. It is instructive to consider a further example, before moving on to a more general discussion.

In the late-1980s, Kalibab himself suffered from *gomma*, namely from the *gomma* of his lineage head Woissabab, which manifested in a broken leg. Woissabab’s *gomma* hit him because Kalibab had refused to attend a *dabba* work party convened by Woissabab. The reason for Kalibab’s refusal was this: While he owned four oxen, his older brother Woissabab, who was more interested in drink and dance than in work, had failed to acquire even a single one. Woissabab therefore heavily relied on Kalibab’s oxen to plough his own fields. In the months leading up to Kalibab’s refusal, Woissabab had called him twice to attend a work party and bring along his oxen. But when Kalibab convened a work party of his own, Woissabab did not show up – despite *dabba* labour services usually being exchanged reciprocally. A little later, Woissabab called Kalibab for yet another *dabba*. But this time Kalibab said he was busy and could not come. Soon after, he broke his leg. The elders who dealt with the case attributed his injury to his act of disrespect toward his lineage head. Did Woissabab not come running to carry our rituals and offer blessings whenever Kalibab called him? And was it then not Kalibab’s duty to work for him in return? The logic

of the situation demanded that Kalibab agree with the elders' analysis; and anxious for his leg to heal, he apologized to Woissabab and promised to not fail him again. But, as Kalibab explained to me in retrospect, it was not actually true that Woissabab 'came running' whenever Kalibab needed his ritual assistance. On the contrary, Woissabab often pretended to be busy, or said it was a bad day for carrying out a ritual or simply failed to show up without any explanation. And this was part of why Kalibab was upset with him and had refused to attend his work party.

Two things came together, then, to spark Kalibab's act of defiance. First, Woissabab was constantly trying to take from Kalibab without giving anything in return. This in itself would have been enough to anger Kalibab since, as I have mentioned, *dabba* labour services are usually exchanged reciprocally. The elders' suggestion that Woissabab was under no obligation to work for Kalibab because he already reciprocated through his ritual work, appears as an ad hoc explanation for Kalibab's broken leg rather than as an adequate rendering of established understandings of *dabba* exchange. It may be that Woissabab had some general sense that he had more of a right to Kalibab's labour than vice versa. But it is also extremely likely that Woissabab was quite aware that to constantly rely on Kalibab's labour without reciprocating in kind was to rather push things. However, it is precisely this kind of pushing which is typical of seniors in Dell. It is about trying to see how far the other will go along – about testing the other's limits of obedience while, at the same time, extracting things from them, be that milk, labour power or something else. Second, Woissabab also angered Kalibab by failing to turn up when asked to carry out rituals. This is part of the logic of withholding things – especially blessings – from those who are in need of them. The point of this sort of withholding is to make the other 'beg' (*miks*) for a while before one eventually gives in. Begging is considered a form of *bonshmi*, and so withholding things is a strategy to get respect. This strategy is often employed by lineage heads, but it also has a much wider currency in *karta*.

In the *karta* form of conflict resolution, for instance, it is common for the wronged party to initially show themselves unforgiving, utterly opposed to the idea that the wrong they have suffered could ever be redeemed. Then the offender, or the mediator acting on their behalf, needs to 'beg'. This is done through displays of extreme humility – prostrating, clutching the other's knees, using extravagant honorifics, putting stones and grass on one's head and other forms of self-abasement. Eventually, the victim will come by a little, though

this means nothing more than that they start making outrageous claims for compensation. These claims get reduced through further ‘begging’; often, indeed, they are eventually dropped altogether – the debt having been settled in the currency of respect.

Withholding something to ‘make others beg’ is also a fixed part of the *karta* way of marrying. At various points in the marriage process, the wife-givers vehemently refuse – to let the girl go, to agree to talk about bridewealth, to accept the amount of bridewealth offered – and their refusal is only overcome through extensive begging. Likewise, when a man seeks to establish fictive kinship with a woman, she will – despite desiring the relation, too – repeatedly refuse even hearing the mediators he has sent her. He then has to send them again and again. Not least for the expenses the man thus incurs this is an expression of respect, which the woman will ultimately answer by consenting. More examples could be given, but the point should have become clear. Begging is considered a form of respect, and to get respect people exploit situations in which they possess what others are in need by making them beg for it.

Now, it is important to understand that this is a culturally established mode of acting. And it would be mistaken to think that those who are put into the position of having to beg do so only grudgingly. On the contrary, up to a certain point, people value begging others, as is evident from the fact that it is often done with relish and visible enjoyment. This is so not only for the instrumental reason that through begging they can obtain what they need – healing, blessings, wives, forgiveness instead of compensation claims, and so on. Treating others with respect, begging included, is also valued in itself because it constitutes you as a good person.

Yet, there are limits to this, and that is why I have said ‘up to a certain point’. There comes a moment when things tip over, when juniors stop going along because they feel that their senior has gone too far. What has been generative of respect up to this point – the practice of withholding or making demands – thereafter generates disrespect. When Kalibab makes demands on Kalinda’s cows’ milk and on her patience, he conceives of her yielding to these demands as an expression of respect. But he takes his demands to the point where Kalinda feels treated unfairly, and this leads her to be disrespectful to him. Similarly, when Woissabab postpones rituals in order to get his junior kin to beg him, this is to a certain point productive of respect, but can, as in Kalibab’s case, eventually lead to defiance.

So how does all this matter for understanding people's sense of *karta* being 'dangerous'? Three points can be made. Firstly, when it is blessings that are being withheld, for instance when a lineage head refuses to carry out rituals, or when someone refuses to grant forgiveness to allow another person to be healed, then there is a very immediate sense of a difficulty to obtain blessings. Secondly, I have suggested that seniors' tendency to push juniors regularly creates tensions. Such tensions however are seen by Dell people as the source of all suffering. And it is due to seeing how seniors' relentless quest to get respect from juniors leads to tensions that people come to perceive *karta* as fraught with danger. Thirdly, one has to assume that there are often enough cases where people, when having the reasons of their suffering diagnosed, are pointed to acts which they carried out in situations where they felt that a senior was acting unfairly. The fact that it is nonetheless they who is ill, leads to a sense that it is very hard to do right in this system. If we add to this the earlier insight concerning explanations for illness that point to acts one was unconscious of, there emerges a sense of *karta* as a system in which it is hard *not* to be hit by *gomma*. As we will see in the following chapter, it was this general sense of danger combined with acute experiences of suffering that led many people to leave *karta* and become *amain*.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined *karta*, the cultural formation which Dell people collectively inhabited until the 1990s and which has since then lost many participants, first and primarily to Evangelicalism, more recently also to Orthodoxy. The chapter has offered an account of the role that respect plays in *karta*, arguing that *bonshmi* is the key objective value structuring ideas, practices and institutions in this cultural formation. We saw how an ideology of social hierarchy is based on the idea that seniors have the power to bless or curse juniors, and how juniors need to show respect to obtain blessings and to thus be well. We also saw how the institutions that constitute *karta* feature a great deal of commensality and how commensality mediates respect – by drawing people into respectful interactions, but also by producing social harmony, and by creating the very relations in which respect can be cultivated. Closely connected to this latter point, we also saw the high value placed on kinship and the various institutions through which people are able to create it. As with commensality, kinship's primary value is perceived to be its affordance of respect. In the second part of the chapter, I turned to the question why, if *karta* is good for respect, so many

people stopped participating in it. Here we learnt that *gomma* – suffering caused by disrespecting a senior – was the key reason for most people to leave *karta*. Starting from an in-depth discussion of one case, I sought to discern reasons for people's sense that *karta* is 'dangerous', meaning: prone to usher in *gomma*. I argued that it is the relentless striving for respect which is invited by this system that creates the tensions which people in Dell regard as the source of all suffering. In the next chapter we will see that one of the principle attractions of Evangelicalism has been its promise to afford a world with less *gomma*. But we will also see how the realization of such a world has come at the cost of respect.

Chapter 2. In Search of Blessings: Evangelicalism, Flourishing and the Question of Respect

2.1 Introduction

In 1984, Baza had been ill for years. His body was covered in ugly wounds, and so repulsive was their stench that even his closest kin avoided coming near him. ‘There were nothing but flies buzzing around me!’ Baza recalled during an interview in 2016. ‘I couldn’t work. I was just at home. My people wouldn’t eat with me. I lay in one part of the hut, and they ate in the other.’ He had seen many diviners, some as far as Maale, to find out what *gomma* was responsible for his suffering. But while he faithfully carried out the measures they prescribed, his health did not improve. Apparently the diviners were unable to discern the true cause of his illness. It therefore hardly surprised Baza that Western medicine did not work either. He had been to the hospital in Jinka several times and had received treatment for tuberculosis. ‘They gave me more than 60 injections’, he recalled incredulously (and perhaps with some exaggeration), ‘but the medicine didn’t work... And how should it have, if we hadn’t discovered the *gomma*?’

It was the tip of a neighbour that finally saved Baza. Did he not know about the *miks eja* (‘prayer house’) in Grashangama, his neighbour asked him, making reference to a small evangelical church that for some time had been established in a place one hour away. Baza was hesitant at first. How could he possibly get involved with people who ‘ate together with *manna* (lower caste people)’? Was he not a *xantsa*, a ‘pure’ (*nytsu*) Aari? And what would his father, a powerful lineage head, say to this? But eventually Baza agreed and, with his father’s consent, asked his neighbour to call the Evangelicals.

‘I agreed that he should call them, and Abba Addayo [the church leader] and some others came and prayed over me. When they prayed there was *shimma* (coolness). So I started attending their church. The first time I went, I was afraid to come close to anyone because I still had these stinking wounds. But they told me to sit next to them, and later we slept under the same blanket.’

Before long, Baza’s health improved. He continued attending the church in Grashangama and was baptized in March 1985. Over the following years, a few other people from Dell converted, and in 1991 there were nine of them. To avoid the long walk to Grashangama, they established their own church in an unused hut in Baza’s compound. This marked the beginning of the rise of Evangelicalism in Dell. While numbers increased only slowly at

first, conversion picked up in the late 1990s. During the time of my fieldwork in 2016/17, about 60% of the population of Dell were *amain*, and numbers keep growing.

When one starts to enquire into the reasons for this massive growth, one quickly hits on the issue of *gomma*. As we saw in the last chapter, people in Dell have traditionally explained suffering as the result of disrespecting seniors. Your failure to show proper respect makes seniors ‘sad’ (*ateri*), and this produces *gomma* – a negative energy, which harms you or your children or property. The vast majority of people explained that they had converted in response to experiencing *gomma*. Especially early converts recalled in a manner similar to Baza’s that prior to their conversion they had been ill for a long time, and that they had spent a great deal of time and wealth trying to discover the *gomma* responsible for this. As we learnt in the last chapter, to be healed one needs to find out whom one has disrespected and ask for their forgiveness (*negane*). But sometimes illness persists, and this means that there is undiscovered *gomma*. For such cases, Evangelicalism’s great promise was that by converting people could be healed without having discovered the *gomma*: Jesus’s unlimited forgiveness (*negane*) would ‘simply clear it away’. In later years, when Evangelicalism had established itself in Dell, people converted rather more quickly and for afflictions less grave than the one reported by Baza. Yet, *gomma* remained the central trigger for conversion, and this is true to this day.

Now, the question what causes conversion is different from the question what leads people to stay with their new religion. Significantly, however, the issue of *gomma* also emerged as central when I asked people why they had remained *amain* after having been healed. For one thing, they explained that if they reverted to *karta* (traditional practice), the *gomma* they had escaped through conversion would ‘get’ (*jed*) them again. But people also highlighted the relative absence of *gomma* as a more general condition among Evangelicals – and a highly attractive one at that. ‘There isn’t a lot of *gomma* in Evangelicalism’ was a typical statement, the positive correlate of which was the notion that ‘in Evangelicalism, there’s a lot of blessing’ (*amain gir anze bedebeda*). By this my interlocutors meant that they enjoyed good health, that their children grew up well, that their cattle multiplied, that their crops gave good yields and so on. In their eyes, this condition of flourishing contrasted markedly with what they had experienced while still participating in *karta*. As one mid-aged woman put it, ‘our children used to die like flies, but since Evangelicalism has come to our land, they no longer die like this.’

Questions

Dell people's engagement with Evangelicalism, the above material suggests, is primarily driven by a concern to better realize the value of blessings. Faced with difficulties obtaining blessings through *karta*, people converted to Evangelicalism; and a sense that Evangelicalism effectively affords greater blessings is what accounts for its lasting attractiveness.

Against this background, the present chapter raises two sets of inter-related questions. First, what does it take to realize blessings through Evangelicalism? How does this differ from realizing blessings through *karta*? What kind of change in practice does this require? And what accounts for people's sense that to be *amain* is to live in a greater state of blessing? Second, what is the effect on respect when people realize blessings through Evangelicalism rather than through *karta*? In the previous chapter we saw the close connection that exists in *karta* between being respectful and receiving blessings. Does Evangelicalism de-couple blessings from respect? Literature on African Christianity has repeatedly pointed to 'breaking' with kin as a precondition for healing (Meyer 1998: 329), and 'breaking' would seem to involve some form of disrespect. Moreover, the rise of Evangelicalism is one of the major changes that took place during the very period in which people say they saw respect decline. So does Dell Evangelicalism, and its particular way of realizing blessings, contribute to the 'decline of respect' that this thesis seeks to account for?

Before I summarize the answers this chapter provides, I would like to indicate that the question whether Evangelicalism in Dell contributes to a decline of respect can be seen as part of a broader anthropological debate, namely whether Christianity is conducive to 'individualism'. Depending on the ethnographic context – and reflecting the many meanings of 'individualism' (Lukes 1973) – this question has been discussed with different emphases. In the Melanesian and Amazonian contexts, the debate has primarily centred around the topic of in/dividual personhood (Robbins 2002, Mosko 2010, Vilaça 2015). In the African context, by contrast, it has more strongly focussed on social dis/connection, i.e. on the question to what extent converts strive – and Christianity allows them – to liberate themselves from traditional obligations and dependencies, and to thus disentangle themselves from the social web in which they are placed. Some scholars have presented material supportive of this thesis (Van Dijk 1992, Meyer 1998, Van de Kamp 2011, Van Wyk 2014). Others, contrarily, have pointed to what Joel Robbins (2009b) has called the

‘social productivity’ of Christianity (Haynes 2017, Scherz 2014, Jones 2009, Lindhard 2010, Englund and Leach 2000). Naomi Haynes, for example, has shown that Copperbelt Pentecostalism, far from being ‘socially corrosive’ (2017: 6), embeds people into ties of dependence, and that the possibility to form such ties is one of its key attractions (ibid.: 72). Against this background, this chapter is also interested in examining ethnographically where the case of Dell fits into the debate about individualism.

Arguments

I begin by offering more information on the history of Dell Evangelicalism and on some of its central doctrines. Here we learn that to secure God’s blessing, Evangelicals need to avoid sin, and that a key form of sin is causing or experiencing ‘sadness’ (*ateri*). The quest for blessings, it turns out, is above all a quest to avoid sadness, and the remainder of the chapter examines how this affects respect. Section 2 argues that the concern with avoiding sadness comes with a re-definition (or ‘trans-valuation’ [Laidlaw 2011]) of what constitutes proper respect. Respecting seniors remains important, since seniors get sad if disrespected. But making juniors sad is sinful, too, and to avoid this, seniors are asked to be humble and to not push juniors around. Respect among Evangelicals thus becomes something one owes to everyone and should seek from no one, and this suggests that Evangelicalism does not contribute to a decline of respect in Dell. Section 3 complicates this impression. I show that the quest to secure blessings leads to a reduction in commensality since commensality – and especially feasting – is seen as a ready source of sin. Many Evangelicals struggle with this reduction in commensality because it means that there are fewer occasions for being in respectful interaction with each other. Here, Evangelicalism *is* felt to undermine respect, and for some people this is a reason to revert to *karta*.

As far as the debate on individualism is concerned, this chapter suggests that Dell sits mid-way between the above sketched poles. On the one hand, people’s engagement with Evangelicalism is not properly described as a deliberate project of dis-connection – greater independence from others is neither a goal for converts, nor is it advertised as desirable by the church. On the other hand, Christianity does introduce a measure of individualism to Dell by pushing people to sacrifice relational activities wherever these threaten to lead into sin. Social disconnection, I argue, here enters through the backdoor, in the wake of the project to better realize blessings.

2.2 Situating Dell Evangelicalism

There are three main churches in Dell, located in the southwestern, eastern and northern part of the *kebele* (see Map 2).¹⁶ These churches all belong to the *Ethiopian Kale Heywot Church*, which with a membership of around 6.7 million is Ethiopia's largest evangelical church. Two of these churches have around 200 adult members each; one of them has around 450 adult members, and this was the church I usually attended. This latter church is the oldest one in Dell and grew out of the one founded in 1991 by Baza and his eight fellow believers. As the hut in Baza's compound became too small, the congregation, in 2002, built a tin-roofed house next to Baza's compound. Five years later they bought land and built an even larger tin-roofed house with a capacity for about 250 worshippers.



Figure 6. A Sunday Service in Dell's largest evangelical Church

¹⁶ Since 2014, there have also emerged two small Pentecostal churches, Mulu Wengel and Assemblies of God. They have only very few members so far, and I will therefore not deal with them in this thesis.

The fact that the churches in Dell pertain to Kale Heywot reflects the mission history of the area. As Donald Donham (1999: Chapter 4) has described in detail, Evangelicalism was first introduced to this part of southern Ethiopia when the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) opened a mission station at Bako in 1954 (see also Fargher 1996). Throughout the South, SIM co-operated with native evangelists, who went out to plant churches. These churches, which became self-governing as soon as the first few locals had been baptized (Haustein 2011: 13), belonged to Kale Heywot, which had been founded by SIM in 1956 (Donham 1999: 93).

In 1961, a new missionary couple arrived in Bako. They were accompanied by Addayo, a young man from Welaita (150km to the northeast), where Evangelicalism had had a strong foothold since the 1930s. Addayo lived and studied with the missionaries for some years, before he set out to Grashangama, a place 2.5 hours north of Bako in order to ‘open up’ that area. It was this church that Baza attended during the late 1980s, and it was from Addayo that Baza and the others first learnt about Evangelicalism. Some years after setting up their own church, they also sent one of their own to study at a Kale Heywot bible school in Jinka. Upon his return in 1998, this man became their magabi or pastor.

A Gospel of Separation?

Founded in 1897 in Toronto, SIM was an interdenominational faith mission with roots in North American fundamentalism (Donham 1999: 84). Fundamentalism was a reaction to the rise of liberal theology and emphasized the verbal inerrancy of Scripture as well as the need for believers to separate themselves from the sinful ways of the world, such as smoking, drinking or dancing (Marsden 1977: 215). As Donham has argued perceptively, in southern Ethiopia this anti-modernism ‘switched signs’ and became a radical rejection of ‘tradition’ (1999: 95). The very renunciation of alcohol amounted to a rejection of much of local practice, in which beer was ubiquitous. But the missionaries and evangelists, and the churches that developed under their guidance, also preached a more general separation from all things ‘traditional’, which were denounced as ‘the work of the Devil’ (see also Freeman 2002: 77)

Accordingly, one of the first things Baza and other converts learnt was the need to ‘abandon’ (*gar*) *karta*. This meant no longer participating in lineage rituals, not sacrificing animals, staying away from diviners and other ritual experts, and disobeying taboos, such as the one that women may not milk cows, or that one has to present new milk to the lineage

head before one is allowed to consume it oneself. They could safely discontinue these practices, Baza and the others were told, because as *amain* they no longer depended on seniors or ritual experts for their blessings but only on God (*sabi, berri*).

The emphasis on ‘separation’ as well as the idea that one no longer depends on seniors could seem to indicate that Evangelicalism here promotes individualism, in the form of disconnection and independence from others. This, indeed, is the track Donham takes in writing about conversion in 1970s and ’80s Maale. Here, too, people pointed to *gomma* (or *gome* as it is called in the Maale language) as a reason for conversion. However, Donham suggests that the real driver of conversion in Maale was the attempt of genealogical juniors to liberate themselves from the ritual authority of their seniors, so as to become more independent in political and economic terms (1999: 116f.). He makes this argument based on the observation that it was above all juniors who flocked to Maale churches and that these people highlighted the benefits of having emerged from under the authority of their seniors. As one man quoted by Donham (*ibid.*: 117) explained, in the past they had to present their honey to the lineage head, but now they were able to eat it on their own: ‘With something as good as this, why should we kill ourselves [attempting to keep the old taboos]?’¹⁷

Now, I have no reason to doubt the validity of Donham’s analysis for the case of 1980s Maale. Indeed, in Dell too, people sometimes speak about the value of being independent of the lineage head and other traditional authorities. It is also true, however, that this is a rather minor point for them, and that it is not given a lot of weight in local evangelical discourse. On the contrary, if only we go a little further in examining the doctrine of Dell Evangelicalism, we quickly come upon teachings that complicate the image of conversion as a matter of gaining independence. This becomes particularly clear when we ask what it takes for Evangelicals to obtain God’s blessing. To enjoy God’s blessing, the most important thing is to avoid sin (*darilsi*). For if you sin, God becomes sad (*ateri*) and his wrath (*sabite gami*)¹⁸ leads you to experience illness or other ‘obstacles’ (*gotha*). God acts in this way because he is a loving father who wishes to give his children the chance to recognize their sins and to ‘turn around’ (*mat*) before it is too late. One turns around by

17 Naty (2005) has made a similar argument for the case of conversion in Zomba, a late 1980s Aari place.

18 While *amain* speak of ‘God’s wrath’ (*sabite gami*) to describe the source from which suffering emanates, they continue to speak of ‘*gomma*’ to describe the suffering caused by sin/transgressions. They will, for instance, ask ‘what *gomma* is this?’ when enquiring about someone’s illness, and this means ‘what sin has lead to this illness?’

confessing (*buts*) one's sins and asking God's forgiveness (*negane*), and this allows one to once again enjoy the health and prospering that is God's blessing.

Given that blessings are predicated on avoiding sin, what do these Christians mean by sin? There are, of course, a great many things one could list here, and none of them are particularly surprising – theft, adultery, not paying one's tithes, cursing and so on. What stands out about Dell, however, is that Evangelicalism here conceptualizes sin primarily in terms of 'sadness' (*ateri*). This is so in two senses. On the one hand, sin is commonly said to *result* in 'sadness'. Not only does God become 'sad' when people sin. But to say that one has made someone 'sad' is also the common way to say that one has sinned against them. (Accordingly, confessions made in the context of conflict resolutions always end with the formula 'I have made you sad, I have made God sad. May you, may God forgive me.') On the other hand, sadness is not only the result of sin. Making others sad is a sin, too – as is becoming sad oneself. As we will see in the following, sadness is among the sins that Dell people are most concerned with; it is on the avoidance of sadness that local evangelical doctrine places its main emphasis.

The emphasis on the need to avoid sadness in some ways echoes *karta*. Indeed, one could be tempted to say that not much has changed at all: In *karta* it is by making seniors sad that you come to suffer. In Evangelicalism you suffer for making God sad – and since God becomes sad when you make other people sad, your suffering still results from making others sad. Yet, there is a crucial change: In *karta* it is only by making your seniors sad that you suffer, whereas in Evangelicalism you suffer for making anyone sad – whether senior or junior, whether kin, non-kin or stranger.

All in all then, to obtain blessings, Dell Evangelicals need to avoid making others sad. Just what this means in practice, of course, remains to be examined. But we can already note that the concern with avoiding sadness is a hint that the church in Dell is animated by relational concerns rather than by an emphasis on 'breaking' with others. Greater independence hardly seems to follow where a person's flourishing remains predicated on not making others sad. The following section substantiates this claim. Through the discussion of a conflict resolution between affines, I bring out normative evangelical understandings of proper respect and show how the concern with avoiding sadness grounds an ethics of humility and mutual respect.

2.3 ‘Making Yourself Heavy Isn’t Respectful’ – Respect Redefined

‘I tell you, this guy is difficult! He eats earth, he doesn’t listen to anyone!’ It was a morning in June 2017. Heavy rain had soaked the land during the night, but now a fresh breeze was driving away the clouds and the green, undulating hills and the ochre mountains bordering them on the western horizon stood out sharply as if viewed through a magnifying glass. As we skidded down muddy paths, descending from Dell in the direction of Gob, Johannis told us about his father-in-law, Solomon, toward whose house we were headed. Next to Johannis (and myself), there was his father Berobab, who like his son had been *amain* for several years, and Abraham, a man in his mid-40s, who had long served the church in various positions. About two years earlier, Johannis had married Solomon’s first daughter, Salamnesh. Failing to get pregnant at first, Salamnesh had recently given birth to a healthy daughter, but had had to get caesarean section at the hospital in Jinka. Her tardy pregnancy and the need for surgery suggested that something was wrong. Hence, Johannis had called on Abraham some days earlier and asked him to accompany him and his father to Solomon’s house, so that they and their affine could ‘take confession together’ (*kikin nisa tey*). Solomon was an unruly character, Johannis explained, and this was why he had asked the help of Abraham, who was known as a skilful mediator.

Solomon received us in a neat little yard in front of his house, and after a bit of small-talk, Abraham calmly explained the purpose of our coming. He summarized Salamnesh’s pregnancy and birth related problems and concluded that, ‘maybe there’s some small thing of sadness (*ateraterdinda rej*), maybe *Gash* [respectful address] Solomon has become sad or there has been some sadness in the house of Berobab... So you should speak to us from your stomach, truly speak from your stomach.’

Berobab rose to speak first. He announced that there were two issues which had made him sad. First, when they had jointly visited Salamnesh at the hospital, Solomon had insinuated that Berobab and Johannis were keen to eat the food provided by the hospital for Salamnesh. ‘He made us look as if we [were so poor we] didn’t have any food at home!’ Second, Berobab complained that, returning from the hospital in the evening, Solomon had not invited them to sleep over, although his house lay half-way between Gob and Dell. To these complaints Johannis added a third one. Some weeks earlier he had met Solomon in the market and they had greeted by shaking hands and touching shoulders. Dell people associate this greeting with Northern Ethiopians, and consider it more egalitarian than customary Aari

greetings, like kissing someone's knee or bowing. In this case, however, Solomon had slightly pushed down his shoulder, Johannis reported, so that Solomon's shoulder touched his own shoulder from above. 'He belittled me, and this really made me veery sad', he concluded, dramatically lengthening the 'very' to reveal the full extent of his sadness.

Quite unlike the unruly character that he was supposed to be, Solomon had listened quietly and now calmly responded to the allegations. All he had suggested at the hospital, he explained, was that Johannis and Berobab buy some extra food for Salamnesh, since the hospital food was of poor quality. On the way home, in turn, he had not abandoned his affines. Rather, the two had entered their relative's house in Gob; and since it was getting dark, Solomon assumed they would sleep there and had hastened home because the area around Gob was dangerous at night. Concerning the shoulder-issue, he said he could not remember it in detail but in any case had not had the intention to belittle Johannis.

When Solomon had ended, Abraham rose to speak. He said that from what he had heard, Solomon had not done anything wrong. He had done well to think of Salamnesh's health; and it seemed that Johannis and Berobab had abandoned him rather than the other way round. Finally, and turning to Johannis, Abraham asserted:

'Solomon is your wife's father. But your wife's father is like your own father. It's not good to greet him in the shoulder-way. You should lower yourself and say, "father-in-law, how art though [using the plural]." If you greet him as if he were your equal, he won't be happy. You didn't respect him. It's from your side that there was a lack of *bonshmi*, not from Solomon's.'

Abraham then asked Johannis and Berobab to seek forgiveness from Solomon. Afterwards, Solomon asked us to come inside, where, apologizing that his wife had not prepared coffee, he offered us some bananas. Before long, we were on our way home.

Analysis (1): On Respecting Seniors

When I discussed this case with Abraham some days later, I learnt about the background of the tensions between the affines. Solomon was rather well-to-do and had apparently taken issue with his daughter marrying into a poor man's house. Berobab did not have a lot of land to begin with; but he had also rented out some of it in order to get money. Therefore he could not give Johannis a good field when Johannis married. Concerned that his daughter should go hungry, Solomon lent his new son-in-law a field free of charge. But this generous gesture, as well as Solomon's initial hesitancy about the marriage, had given Johannis and

his father the sense that Solomon was looking down on them for their poverty. During the conflict resolution they sought to prove this by referring to the episode in the hospital and the shoulder-issue.



Figure 7. After the conflict resolution Solomon and Berobab hug to show their reconciliation and Abraham speaks a blessing over them.

Their move to initiate a conflict resolution with Solomon, then, appears as a gambit to have their sense of humiliation recognized and to get more respect from Solomon. For had Solomon been found to be in the wrong, his daughter's troubles would have appeared as God's attempt to correct Solomon. And to avoid further harm for his daughter, he would henceforth have had to treat his affines more respectfully. Salamnesh's troubles, it seems, were used by Johannis and his father in an attempt to seek greater respect for themselves.

Their attempt did not go well, though. Solomon convincingly refuted their allegations and left little doubt that he had not demeaned them in any tangible way. Moreover, Johannis' point about greeting backfired. He had obviously assumed to have a right to be treated as an equal by his father-in-law. However, Abraham authoritatively tells him that this is not so, and that, indeed, he ought to show Solomon special respect.

Abraham's explanation – 'your wife's father is like your own father' – references a more general emphasis of the local church on the need for people to respect their seniors: for children to respect their parents, wives to respect their husbands, younger brothers to respect older sisters and so on. This was repeatedly stated. One sermon, for instance, centred around 1 Peter 5:5 (NIV)¹⁹ 'In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourself to your elders.' Another time, I accompanied a group of church leaders on their bi-annual tour through people's houses aimed at seeing 'how they were walking together in the Lord.' In each house, one of the leaders addressed some opening remarks at the assembled household. These were built around Ephesians 6: 1-4, the first part of which states: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother" – this is the first commandment with a promise – "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."'

'Honour your father and mother,' of course, is among the first principles of Christianity. It is therefore not surprising to find it emphasized in Dell. At the same time, the need to honour or respect one's parents (the Aari bible uses *bonshmi* for both 'honour' and 'respect') has also been recognized in pre-Christian times. Just as Paul tells the Ephesians, so *karta* asserts that you need to respect your seniors, 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth' (and not be hit by *gomma*). Against this background, the question arises as to what, if any, is the difference between *karta* and

19 English bible citations follow the New International Version.

Evangelicalism in terms of the respect asked of juniors? Does becoming *amain* put limits to the respect one is expected to show to seniors?

Clearly, some such limits are introduced by Evangelicalism. These mainly concern traditional authorities and the taboos and obligations associated with them. In *karta*, to not fetch water from a sacred stream is no less a form of respect than presenting first milk to the lineage head or providing labour services to the king and the ritual experts. In the evangelical view, however, this is idolatry and hence prohibited. Lineage heads or ritual experts may take offence at no longer being respected and they may become sad about their dwindling followership. But in this case the concern to have no other gods before God overrides that with avoiding sadness and justifies disrespect.

In many other cases, however, the concern to avoid sadness is given precedence and respect remains mandated – even if it rubs uneasily against other evangelical principles. The following two examples illustrate this.

My first example relates to Daud, a young *amain* man who got married. Two days after the wedding night, I was present when he anxiously held council with his father and older brothers. During the two previous nights, Daud had been unable to consummate his marriage, and in Dell, erectile dysfunction is commonly understood as the result of having disrespected a senior. On the first morning after the wedding night, there had therefore already been a round of confessions in the family. But apparently the problem lay outside of the family. And so on the second morning, the men started to think about who else could have become sad. In the course of the discussion, Daud's father pointed out that they had not sent elders to the bride's father's brothers to ask their consent to the marriage. Among Evangelicals, only the bride's father is asked for his consent. But according to the *karta* way, elders need to be sent to all of the bride's patrikin. This has to be done on several consecutive days, and on each day the elders deferentially clutch the knees of the respective household head and endure his (ritualized) ranting and raving until he finally consents to the marriage. Now, Daud's bride was from an evangelical family, but a few of her father's brothers were *alem*. When Daud's older brother, who is a leader in one of his church's small groups, heard that no elders had been sent to these *alem* people, he stated that, 'If they were *amain* it wouldn't be an issue for them. But since they are *alem* this can make them sad.' And he went on to suggest that elders should be sent to them right away.

Daud's nuptial problems, then, are attributed to the (assumed) sadness of his bride's *alem* relatives over not having had their knees clutched and their consent begged. Daud did not consider it necessary to send elders to honour them in this way because Dell Evangelicalism generally disapproves of this practice as 'showing *karta*' (*kartanem dau*). Clutching the knees of extended relatives is a *karta* thing and if Evangelicals were to do it, this would suggest to onlookers that they had not properly 'abandoned *karta*.' But if the church rejects this practice, then why should God hinder Daud from consummating his marriage? The answer must be that 'not making sad' is more important than 'not showing *karta*.' To paraphrase the thinking that stands behind Daud's brother's proposal to send elders to the bride's *alem* relatives: If they get sad unless they are begged, then let them be begged – after all, it is just a customary form of showing respect and does not amount to idolatry.

The primacy of avoiding sadness is also visible in my second example, which concerns Kalinda. Some months after Betsinda's death (cf. Chapter 1), Kalibab asked Kalinda to brew beer for the upcoming *shishi* memorial feast. This was a real source of anxiety for Kalinda because Evangelicals are prohibited to make alcohol. But she also knew that Kalibab would give her a hard time if she refused his demand. Kalinda therefore asked a church leader about the matter. He told her that it would be fine and indeed necessary to comply with her husband's demand. For one thing, she had not come up on her own with the idea to brew beer, and as long as she did not drink any of it, there was no sin. To disrespect her husband's wishes, however, would be a sin, and was hence to be avoided.

I also learnt about several cases where an *alem* husband prohibited his wife from attending church on Sunday and instead asked her to work with him in the fields. Regular church attendance and abstaining from work on Sundays are very important for *amain*. But in these cases the church took the position that the primary duty for these women was to obey their husbands, and that not coming to church would not be a sin.

As these examples highlight, Evangelicalism in Dell places high value on respecting seniors. Limits to this exist but are few. Beyond the issue of idolatry, the principle of avoiding sadness dominates other religious concerns. Daud ought to show an otherwise not sanctioned form of respect to his bride's *alem* relatives. Kalinda ought to honour her husband by obeying his request to brew beer, even if brewing beer is otherwise prohibited to Evangelicals. In neither of these cases do juniors appear as particularly 'individualized' or

‘independent’ from seniors. Rather, the concern with avoiding sadness reaffirms the need to respect those ‘above’ and buttresses the kind of dependencies Dell people have long recognized.

Analysis (2): The Humble Senior

And yet, something fundamental has changed. To see this, let us go back to Johannis and Solomon. Remember that Johannis complained about having had his shoulder pushed down. This suggests that Solomon tried to bring some hierarchy to their greeting and that he was perhaps not entirely happy with being greeted in the ‘shoulder-way’. But the fact that they greeted by touching shoulders at all is remarkable – at least from a *karta* viewpoint. After attending the conflict resolution at Solomon’s, I asked several of my *alem* acquaintances how they greeted their father-in-law. To these men it seemed inconceivable to touch shoulders. They explained that in the first months after marriage you avoided your *baisi* completely to show your fear (*bashi*) – jumping helter-skelter into a bush if he happened to cross your path – and later you kissed his knee. As one young man confided, ‘when [my father-in-law] looks at me, I get scared. So I cast my eyes down and keep quiet.’ But among Evangelicals, it was not uncommon for young men to greet their father-in-law by touching shoulders. Similar shifts were observable in other relations. Mother’s brothers were kissed on the mouth rather than on the knee. And older siblings addressed younger siblings with the respectful ‘*Amtsha*’ (for women) or ‘*Gash*’ (for men) rather than to call them by their first name. During our conversation about the case of Johannis and Solomon, Abraham explained this change as follows:

In *alem* they kiss the knee. In *amain* we don’t do that. We say ‘we are one in Father Jesus’. One shouldn’t say, ‘I’m heavy, you are small’. ... If I tell you to kiss my knee, I make you little, I make myself heavy. Instead, we greet each other by hugging, by touching shoulders. In *alem*, the senior says, ‘I’m heavy, you’re a nephew, you’re a younger brother, you’re a woman. I’m a heavy person, you don’t reach up to my shoulder so you kiss my knee.’ This is because they like to make themselves heavy...’ / J: But didn’t you also say that the bible asks us to show *bonshmi* to our seniors? / Yes, in *amain* we don’t say, ‘don’t show respect’. It’s good if you do! ... But making yourself into a heavy person isn’t respectful (*bonshmi daki*).

Abraham here reveals the understanding that it is not only juniors who owe seniors respect but that seniors also ought to respect juniors. This is implied by his suggestion that to ask a junior to kiss one's knee is to belittle them. And it becomes explicit in his final sentence, where he suggests that it 'isn't respectful' for seniors to make themselves heavy. At the same time, Abraham also offers a more specific account of what being respectful would mean for seniors. In relation to their juniors, he suggests, people ought to 'not make themselves heavy'. This means that they should not in any way emphasize their superiority; they should avoid self-aggrandizement, especially where this involves belittling others. To this corresponds another frequently voiced idea, namely that seniors should 'make themselves small' or 'lower themselves' (*mata jintem tokso*). This is also the expression that the Aari bible uses to translate 'humility', and humility indeed seems like a good gloss for the kind of respect that Dell Evangelicalism demands of seniors.

The notion that seniors, too, ought to be respectful, stands in stark contrast to *karta* understandings, where seniors 'bless' or 'help' (*kelsh*) juniors, but where the term '*bonshmi*' would never be used for describing what seniors do to juniors. The demand for seniors to be humble constitutes one of the most significant changes introduced by Christianity to Dell, and therefore requires a little more analysis. What exactly does it mean for seniors to be humble, and how does this new demand come to affect people's practice? In the remainder of this section I make two points, relating to humility as a virtue and as an institutionalized value respectively.

To approach my first point, let me offer a further vignette, which is from the same day as the conflict resolution. On that day, Abraham had told me to come to his house at dawn, so that we could all walk to Solomon together. I found Abraham somewhat anxious. His wife Sara had fallen ill during the night and had asked him to take her to the hospital in the morning. Abraham thought this was unnecessary. Like other dedicated Evangelicals, he assumed that if you are ill because you have sinned, confession is necessary and sufficient to be healed. But if God wants to test your faith, as he tested Job's, no medicine in the world will cure you. So really, going to the hospital was a waste of money and Sara's request showed that she did not fully trust in God. It was a sign of 'weak faith' (*imnet lanxmi*). At the same time, to not take her to the hospital would make his wife sad, Abraham reasoned. This was both problematic in itself and would have been especially troublesome on this particular day. John 9: 31, he explained, left no doubt that you could not serve God if you

were in a state of sin. Hence, if he made his wife sad, he would not be able to lead the conflict resolution, as Johannis had asked him to do. This would mean disappointing those who had requested his help. Not only had he given them his word. The bible also stated that church leaders ought to be ever ready to drop their own affairs and ‘run’ to assist others. (And this was something he and others contrasted with the desire of lineage heads to be begged lengthily before agreeing to carry out a ritual.) Faced with these competing demands, Abraham finally decided that his oldest son had to miss out on school that day to take his mother to the hospital. Thus, Abraham avoided making his wife sad and was able to lead the conflict resolution.

Abraham, then, effectively put back his own interests behind those of his wife, paying for what in his understanding was useless – and doing so despite being notoriously short of money. Moreover, he put back his own concern with being ‘spiritually strong’ and accepted that his wife decided for the less virtuous option of going to the hospital rather than to trust in God. This kind of ‘putting back one’s own interests’, I suggest, is an important part of what it means for seniors to be humble. Especially in the case of domestic relations, it marks a profound change. Though certainly not devoid of affection, it seems fair to say that domestic relations in Dell have traditionally been marked by a great deal of struggle, with men trying to retain as much of the household income for themselves, and constantly putting their wives in the position of having to beg them (e.g. to give them grain from the granary or money to buy salt). Indeed, when I later that day told Kalibab and his wives about the episode with Abraham, Kalibab prided himself with a mischievous smile that he had never in his life given his wives money to go to the hospital.²⁰ Abraham, by contrast, did not only pay for his wife to go to the hospital. More generally, he had organized their domestic life so that she did not need to beg him. She could take grain from the granary on her own; and he had also given her a key to his ‘box’ (satin), which is where men in Dell store their money. A rather striking move even by evangelical standards, this was to allow her to take money for purchases if he was not around. For Abraham all this followed from his aspiration to not give his wife reason to become sad and to live up to the ideal of being humble.

²⁰ Kalinda and Mangeshinda confirmed this and went on to tell me how, when he was still a little younger, Kalibab would beat them and how they would wrestle on the floor. As Mangeshinda recalled, ‘one time he stepped on my spine and used his foot like a mortar. My back hurts to this day!’

Humility, then, could be described as a virtue that Abraham seeks to cultivate. He deliberates about his actions in the light of this value and seeks to shape accordingly his everyday practice as well as his response to novel situations such as the dilemma encountered on the day of the conflict resolution. In doing so he often goes beyond what the run-of-the-mill Evangelical in Dell would do, and this makes him appear as an exemplar in many people's eyes. I will say more about evangelical self-cultivation and exemplarity in Chapter 4. But here I want to note a second way in which the evangelical value of humility comes to shape people's practice: Humility is also a value that structures – or is 'built into' – evangelical institutions, and to participate in these institutions is to be pushed to act in a humble way. Let me illustrate this by going back to Solomon once more.

Remember that the allegations levelled against Solomon turned out to be false, and that Johannis was found to have been lacking in respect toward his father-in-law. This is why Abraham told Johannis and Berobab to seek Solomon's forgiveness, which the latter granted without further ado. The swiftness of this stands in marked contrast to *karta* conflict resolutions. As described in Chapter 1, the aggrieved party here at first pretends to be irreconcilable. They need to be 'begged' through extravagant displays of self-abasement, such as prostrating or placing grass on one's head, before they eventually agree to a settlement. This often involves compensation, and in any case the offender has to provide drinks or food for everyone involved in the negotiations. Pushing others to 'beg', of course, is a typical instance of 'making oneself heavy' and irreconcilable with evangelical humility. Legitimate and expected in the *karta* case, 'making beg' therefore does not feature in evangelical conflict resolutions. Here, contrarily, forgiveness is to be granted freely and without delay.

In people's own understanding to grant forgiveness swiftly is simply 'how it's done'. That is, evangelical conflict resolutions are encountered as a fixed cultural form, as something that has its own logic and is not up for negotiation. This does not necessarily mean that it feels easy for everyone to act according to this logic. Nor does it mean that Evangelicals never attempt to 'make themselves heavy'. Yet, there is a clear expectation that they act humbly, and those who do otherwise are met with public disapproval. Church leaders critique them and others consider them as 'hard-stomached (*norti zami*, the local equivalent of cold-hearted). Also, in more than one case someone's illness was attributed to their earlier failure to grant forgiveness freely, and this brings home with great clarity the

message that to realize blessings through Evangelicalism you need to be respectful of others (see Chapter 4 for an example). Successful participation in evangelical conflict resolutions, in brief, is predicated on showing humility.

Similar observations could be made for many other evangelical institutions. For instance, where the *karta* way of marrying is replete with possibilities for wife-givers to demand special respect from wife-receivers – by becoming angry, not granting consent to the marriage, making outrageous demands for bridewealth etc. – the evangelical marriage process is swift, calm and non-antagonistic. More generally, the established forms of local evangelical social life do not make room for the kind of practices through which Dell people have traditionally sought respect: withholding what others are in need of, acting in a loud and threatening way, making unrealistic demands and so on. It is in this sense that humility is built into evangelical institutions, and that to participate in these institutions is to be pushed to be respectful of others, irrespective of who they are.

Summary

In the context of a discussion of Appiah's (2010) work on moral revolutions, James Laidlaw (2011) draws our attention to what he calls 'trans-valuations'. By this Laidlaw refers to processes whereby existing values are given a new meaning and the changes that can result from this. In Appiah's case, this happened to the value of honour. Previously at the base of practices like duelling in Britain or foot-binding in China, honour, when redefined, led to the sudden demise of these practices. This was because those who had previously engaged in these practices now understood that it was dishonourable to maintain them. Laidlaw suggests that,

'[b]ehind this may well lie a point about ethics that applies more generally than just to honour. The same kind of trans-valuation can be done with other values, such as purity, courage, beauty, friendship, or compassion. It can always be discovered that courage really requires – or 'real courage' requires – something quite different from existing conventional understandings' (Laidlaw 2011, not paginated).

Evangelicalism in Dell, I suggest, has affected such a 'trans-valuation' for the value of respect. Whereas in *karta* respect is something one owes to seniors and seeks from juniors, in Evangelicalism one owes respect to everyone and should seek it from no one. In terms of the terminology introduced in Chapter 1, we may speak of a shift from *directional* to *mutual* recognition respect. This changed understanding is reflected in evangelical institutions,

which in turn lead to changes in people's practice. All in all, respect remains central – not only in ideological terms but also in people's own outlook. Being respectful, after all, is key to enjoying God's blessing. Against this background, Evangelicalism in Dell does not appear to contribute to a decline of respect or a rise of individualism. The next section complicates this impression.

2.4 'What's the point in just eating?' - Respect Undermined

As mentioned before, I often spent the hour after dark by the fire in Kalinda's hut, chatting with her as she prepared dinner. I greatly valued these conversations since Kalinda was an acute observer of life in Dell and seemed to take pleasure in sharing her thoughts and observations. One Sunday evening, Kalinda commented on an event that had taken place in church that day. Toward the end of the service, some five or six couples with newborn babies had been asked to come forward. There had then been a short ceremony in which a church leader gave a name to each of the babies, asked the parents to raise them as devout Christians, and finally prayed for God's blessing. The whole thing had been over very quickly, Kalinda commented, going on to recall with nostalgia the *karta* naming ceremonies in which she had participated prior to her conversion in the late 1990s. Three or four months after you had born a child, Kalinda told me, the lineage head and his wife would invite you and the other lineage members to their house. The floor would be covered with aromatic leaves and reeds, as is common on holidays, and the *toidi*'s wife would have brewed beer.

On that day, they treat you with a lot of *bonshmi*! 'She has born a child for us! Our lineage is getting bigger, it's getting bigger!' they would say. Everyone is very happy... Our *toidi* takes the child. He tickles it. 'How shall we call it?' he asks playfully... Later we all sit together, we drink beer, we drink coffee, we eat boiled maize. The whole day we chat and smile. ... But in *amain* they don't even eat a single *xorxor* (fried dough ball; a synonym for cheap food)!

Kalinda's critical observation about evangelical naming ceremonies points us to a more general fact: compared with *karta*, Evangelicalism in Dell involves significantly less commensality. To some extent this is because of the rejection of animal sacrifice. While sacrifice (which is always followed by feasting) is central to lineage rituals like the one described by Esias in Chapter 1, it obviously has no place in evangelical religious life. Here, food only appears in the form of the monthly Eucharist – a morsel of bread and a mouthful

of honey water. But the relative reduction in commensality is also evident when it comes to evangelical social institutions like funerals, weddings, or conflict resolutions. Only think of the above case. Solomon offered us some bananas, but soon we were on our way home. *Karta* conflict resolutions, by contrast, invariably are followed by sociable drinking, and more often than not people end up in one of the bars in the main village.

Everyone in Dell would agree with the observation that there is relatively less commensality among Evangelicals. In fact, we will see that this is something the church explicitly values. Nonetheless, for many Evangelicals this is an aspect of their religion they sometimes struggle with. As Kalinda's comparison between *karta* and evangelical naming ceremonies suggests, she experiences the latter as involving less *bonshmi* than the former. This is easily comprehensible, given what we know about the link between commensality and respect (cf. Chapter 1). Eating together, after all, has traditionally been the most important context for people to create and cultivate respectful relations.

Despite her misgivings about the lack of commensality, it is inconceivable for Kalinda to ever abandon her religion. There is much in Evangelicalism for which she is grateful, notably the emphasis on mutual respect and the greater state of blessing in which she feels she has lived ever since converting. For other people, however, the austere nature of Dell Evangelicalism *is* a reason to revert to *karta*. These are above all men, especially wealthier and more senior men. As I gradually discovered, a good number of the older *alem* men in Dell had at some point converted to Evangelicalism, but had left again after they had been cured of the affliction which had motivated their conversion. These men explained that they had found Evangelicalism 'unsatisfying' (*dassegayinda*). They enjoyed drinking beer with their peers, dancing *guzza* or participating in a *siri* feasting group. And contrary to women and more junior men they also had the resources for such practices. But as Evangelicals, all of this had been prohibited to them, and so they had eventually decided to revert to *karta*.

Against this background, the reduction of commensality in *amain* can be said to play a two-fold role in the overall decline of respect. First, a more general decline of commensality is one of the things people point to when they talk about declining respect. Given that 60% of the population are *amain*, the evangelical reduction of commensality clearly contributes to the overall decline of commensality. Second, reduced commensality is a key reason for senior men to prefer *karta* (or Orthodoxy, cf. Chapter 5) over

Evangelicalism. This, however, contributes to religious and social heterogeneity – some *amain*, others *alem* or Orthodox – which for Dell people is an expression of reduced ‘unity’ and figures in their accounts about a decline of respect (cf. Conclusion).

Given that the evangelical reduction of commensality has a negative effect on respect, it is important to find out what motivates this reduction. Significantly, we will see that it is the very same concern as the one discussed in the previous section. As I go on to show now, the reduction in commensality is a result of the quest to avoid sadness and *gomma* and to secure God’s blessing. My starting point for this discussion are evangelical funerals.

Funerals and the Perils of Feasting

Compared to *karta* funerals, evangelical funerals are remarkably calm and short affairs. One of the first differences one notes is the absence of wailing. Those who arrive at the funeral compassionately shake hands with the dead person’s closest kin, and then sit down and quietly wait for the service to begin. Sometimes *alem* relatives arrive wailing. But there are ushers placed at the entrance to the compound. ‘Stop your crying, this is not a day of sadness!’ they try to shush them. The service opens with a prayer, which everyone listens to with their eyes closed. Then, clad in colourful silk robes, bodies gently swinging back and forth, a choir performs two songs. Neither mournful nor happy, these songs radiate composure and quiet confidence, and people listen to them silently. After a sermon and another prayer, the coffin is buried just outside of the compound. Back inside the compound, platters with food are handed around. Everyone grabs some handfuls and chats for a while, but soon the platters are empty and people start leaving, and only close kin and nearby neighbours stay behind for the night.

If you think back to my description of a *karta* funeral in Chapter 1, you will note a number of differences. Here I want to focus on the issue of food. In my description of Betsinda’s funeral, we saw that affines brought along food which they gave to the kin of the dead person. This is also done among Evangelicals. In *karta*, the affine’s gift is reciprocated in kind on the same evening. But in the evangelical case, the food given by the affines goes unreciprocated. Evangelicals mark this difference by saying that theirs is *kelshi* (help), whereas what is given in the *karta* case is *jaxi* (from *jaxken*, ‘to throw down’). ‘*Jaxi*’ also describes a deposit in a rotating savings association; and this points us to the underlying

expectation that something will be returned. But in the evangelical case there is to be no return. Why not? Pastor Petrus explained things as follows:

‘*Jaxi* means you give something and later it’s returned to you. But this doesn’t help, you see! If you eat what you gave, what does that help [the host of the funeral]?... So in order to not bring further sadness to those who have become sad about the death of their relative, we don’t do this.’

Petrus’s explanation needs to be understood against the background that *karta* funerals mean considerable expenditure for the dead person’s close kin. To be sure, their exchange with the affines is neutral – they return to them an amount of food or drink roughly equal to the one received; and from this the affines feed their followers. But the close kin also have to provide food for their own extended kin group and for visitors who do not come as part of a group of affines. Kalibab vividly affirmed that, ‘it’s really a very big problem if a person of your house dies. It finishes your grain! Maybe they die in the rainy season [when grain reserves are low]. Then you have to borrow or buy from the market.’ In evangelical funerals, by contrast, the food provided by the affines is distributed among everyone. Hence close kin do not have to provide a lot of their own.

Petrus’s reasoning that this is ‘to not bring further sadness’ to the bereaved is familiar to us. It is particularly important in the funeral context, though. This is because, ideally, people should not become sad about someone’s death. It is God’s sovereign decision to take life, and sadness suggests one’s non-acceptance of this decision. Of course, in reality people do get sad – on the third day after the funeral kin actually unite to formally ask God’s forgiveness for this. But the inevitability of sadness in the context of death makes it all the more important to not give any further reason for sadness. To do so would be to ‘trouble the one who is troubled already’, and this for *amain* is a sin. In the case of funerals, then, a sense of economic burden is identified as a source of – or an experience akin to that of – sadness. And the aim to avoid this results in less food: only affines give, but not the kin of the dead.

There is a more general pattern here. Over the past years, there has been some institutional change in the church, which was driven precisely by a concern with unburdening people from obligations that might make them sad. To begin with, the church has developed new rituals for marriage and thanksgiving at graduation from college. In both cases, the older form takes place at home and requires the host to provide food for a large number of invitees. The new form takes place in church, involves fewer people and requires

much less food. The older form is deemed better because a greater number of people, including *alem*, will listen to the service held on the occasion. And those who have the means tend to opt for this older form, which is also the more prestigious one. But for less affluent people, this older form was economically burdensome and linked to a lot of worry about incurring shame for letting guests go hungry. The new form was designed with the express aim of unburdening these people.



Figure 8. Food is passed around at an evangelical funeral

A second, very telling example of institutional change concerns Christmas celebrations. From 1991 to 2005, the congregation bought one or two oxen each year, which were eaten together in church. During the first five years, people contributed according to their means, some 50 Cents, others five Birr and the richest people up to ten Birr. But in 1996 it was decided that every household would pay the same amount because some (presumably wealthier) people had been unhappy with the previous mode. This was done for some years, but then discussions flared up again. On the one hand, there now were poorer people who felt burdened by the contribution that was asked of them. On the other hand, some people remarked enviously that while every household paid the same amount of money, larger families consumed a greater share of the meat than families with fewer children. In response to these unholy sentiments, church members in 2005 decided that they would better stop eating meat altogether. As one man who witnessed the discussions recalled, ‘We said, “It’s this meat that is turning into an obstacle for us. But we shall not trip over such a worldly thing. Let the meat go.”’ In the following years, Christmas celebrations saw church members eating roasted grain together. But then this too was dropped for being identified as a cause of ill-feelings: some had complained that while they brought along wheat or barley, others only brought roasted maize, which is much cheaper. Since this time Christmas has been celebrated without any commensality in church.

Now, those who were already part of the church when there was still meat for Christmas, have very fond memories of this. And more generally it is important to note that Evangelicals in Dell do enjoy eating together. Also, inviting others to food is clearly considered a good thing, just as jealousy (*nixmi*) about food is unambiguously a bad thing. However, what the above examples suggest, is a readiness to sacrifice commensality wherever it threatens to lead people into sin – and a pervasive sense that commensality does so rather easily.

We can substantiate this by returning to the funeral. We saw that there is less food in evangelical funerals, and that this is an effect of the concern to ‘not bring further sadness’ to the bereaved. For some Evangelicals this relative lack of food is rather deplorable. But from the official viewpoint it is explicitly valued. This has to do with another aim behind evangelical funerals: that they be over quickly!

In the last chapter I described the lengthy wailing, dancing and chanting witnessed at Betsinda’s funeral. Several times it appeared as if the coffin was about to be removed from

its hut. But then there was yet another round of dancing. Finally, Betsinda was only buried when it had almost become too dark to see – anything other would have counted as a lack of respect toward her. Afterwards, people drank and ate, there was more dancing, and everyone slept over in the same compound. Evangelical funerals, by contrast, begin at around two o'clock in the afternoon, the burial takes place in plain daylight, and people are on their way home before it gets dark. That people should go home quickly was a great concern. In fact, the service was typically opened with the phrase, 'we don't have time, so let's get started'. A key reason for this was Evangelicals' observation that *karta* funerals were a common occasion for adultery as well as illicit sex among the unmarried. To avoid this, it was important to get done with the funeral quickly, and this in turn required that there only be little food. 'You see', Petrus explained to me, echoing a widespread notion, 'when there's food, our people don't go home until it's all been eaten.'

Indeed, for everyone to only get some handfuls of boiled maize was not only good because it caused people to leave quickly. If people had the chance to gorge themselves (possibly even on meat), Petrus went on to explain, they would sooner or later also start to call for alcohol – and where there was alcohol, there would soon also be adultery, fighting and murder.

On this account, then, feasting easily leads to sin. This view, which was widespread among my evangelical interlocutors, has some resonance with Diego Malara's findings among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa. In the view of these Christians,

'rather than placating fleshly desires, satiety augments them. Being satiated and consuming meat "makes the body hot" ..., increasing sexual desire. Eating too much and too often is also associated with an increase in aggression and ensuing conflict ... my informants pointed out that the eruption of fights among common acquaintances often coincided with feasts and other occasions of intense commensality.' (Malara 2018: 25)

As Malara notes, similar views have long been common across Orthodox Northern Ethiopia (cf. Levine 1965: 80f.). In Dell, however, the problematization of feasting only came up with Evangelicalism. As I have shown in the previous chapter, traditional thought accords high value to feasting, considering it as a means to achieve social harmony rather than as a source of problems. While feasting does in practice sometimes lead to conflict, this, in *karta*, is not given weight on the ideological level. Indeed, it would be possible to argue that it is precisely the risk associated with feasts which makes them powerful (cf. Nahum-Claudel 2016: 10): If they could not degenerate into disrespect and *gomma*, the *bonshmi*

generated in successful feasts would not be noteworthy and valuable. For Evangelicals in Dell, however, this is a risk one should not take. At least from the church's point of view, it is more important that people avoid sin than that they cultivate respectful relations through commensality. And contrary to Malara's Orthodox Christians, who deal with the dangers of feasting not through abandoning it altogether but through alternating it with fasting (2018: 26), Dell Evangelicalism rather pushes in the direction of a more general reduction of feasting – of cutting down commensality to the bare minimum.

Apart from the risk involved in feasting, its decline also has to do with the fact that local Evangelicalism does not recognize any need for what in the traditional understanding is a key function of commensality, namely to relate people. In the *amain* understanding, conversion makes a person part of the family of God, and the relatedness that exists among believers is much stronger than any tie that could be created through a worldly means like food. This understanding, in fact, has led the local church to prohibit the different kinds of 'fictive kinship' which people in Dell have traditionally aspired to create. As I have explained in the previous chapter, such relations were created through the exchange of livestock and feasts and were valued for the respect they afforded. But to create such relations, the church argues, runs counter to the message that people are already related in Christ.

Taken together, it is the notion that commensality readily leads to sin, on the one hand, and the view that there is no positive need for commensality to relate people, on the other hand, which motivates the reduction of commensality in Dell Evangelicalism. This reduction means less of the kind of interaction people perceive as generative of *bonshmi*. It is in this sense that Evangelicalism – unwittingly – contributes to the decline of respect.

2.5 Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter I quoted a woman saying that, 'Our children used to die like flies, but since Evangelicalism has come to our land, they no longer die like this.' As this quote suggests, Evangelicals in Dell have a palpable sense that their religion affords them greater flourishing. To be *amain*, these people feel, is to lead lives more richly blessed and less prone to be undermined by *gomma*. This chapter has largely been a study of what it takes to lead such lives. In other words, I have explored what these Christians take to be the conditions of possibility for enjoying God's blessing. This analysis brought to light the

importance of being respectful of others, so as to not make them sad and incur God's wrath. However, we could also ask what accounts for people's sense that they have really achieved a greater state of blessing – one in which children no longer die like flies, where there is less illness and disaster.

One conceivable answer here could point to objective improvements in the population's health level. Though still minimal, health services have improved over the past two decades, and child mortality in particular has decreased due to state-led vaccination campaigns. Yet, illness, misfortune and death have obviously not disappeared from Dell, and so more is required to explain why people feel that being *amain* means enjoying greater flourishing. My suggestion here is that this sentiment is related to the greater social harmony which the evangelical concern with avoiding sadness has helped to produce. Of course, people do not always live up to the ideal of being respectful to everyone. Yet, Evangelicals have a vivid sense that life among them – in the household, among neighbours, in the church – is much more peaceful and marked by mutual attentiveness than among *alem*; and this is an emic observation that it is hard to contradict. The confinement of seniors' relentless quest for respect in particular reduces what has traditionally been a frequent source of conflict. Greater social harmony, however, means less of the tensions that Dell people have long considered the root-cause of all suffering. And so it may be less the objective improvements in living conditions that account for people's sense of greater flourishing than the fact that there is less of that which people think contravenes flourishing.

These perceived improvements notwithstanding, engagement with Evangelicalism is also felt to have come at a cost. The final section of this chapter showed how the quest to avoid sin led to a reduction in commensality. One of the most important practices for entering into respectful interaction, commensality is also felt to carry a high risk of leading to sin – to drunkenness, fighting and adultery, to resentment, jealousy, or sadness about burdensome obligations. Tracing recent institutional transformations in local Evangelicalism, we saw how commensality was sacrificed wherever it ran counter to the project of leading godly lives. It is this readiness to sacrifice commensality and related practices which makes Dell Evangelicalism a factor in the broader decline of respect. Phrased in terms of the debate on individualism, Christianity in Dell has an individualizing effect inasmuch as its institutions do not lead to as much interaction and relatedness among people as do *karta* institutions. However, if people overall spend less time socializing, this is

not because social disconnection is valued per se, whether ideologically or by individual Evangelicals. Rather, a measure of disconnection here appears as a collateral effect of the broader project to secure God's blessing. Individualism, we might say, enters in the wake of the quest for greater flourishing.

Chapter 3. Respect's Rival: Economic Development and the Quest for Reputation

3.1 Introduction

On a hot and dusty afternoon in late February 2017, I was sitting with Kalibab in the shade of his house. We had just completed an interview on the decline of *siri* feasting groups, and now Kalibab was pensively letting his eyes wander across the sunburnt country. The end of the dry season was near and there was an atmosphere of anticipation, with everyone waiting in the wings to start sowing as soon as the first rains arrived. From the opposite hill the sharp cracks of a bull-whip cut through the air as our neighbour Lanksa prepared his field.

Pointing to Lanksa, Kalibab commented that until two or three decades ago people did not work much at this time of the year. After the main harvest in January, they rested until Easter, and work only really started in late April. In those days, the land had not 'warmed up' yet, and excessive rainfall meant they could only plant one crop per year not two. 'But', Kalibab went on to assert in more general terms, it was also true that, 'in the past we just didn't know how to work! Our stomachs were all we cared about. We didn't make plans to grow, we didn't think about showing change.' It was a familiar discourse, and so I pressed Kalibab a bit on whether their economic lives had really changed as substantively as he and others had repeatedly suggested to me. Slightly exasperated perhaps with my inability to see the obvious, he responded passionately:

Look, Juli, I don't sleep any more! When the cocks crow four o'clock, there are many thoughts up here in my head. I think. I really think a great lot. What am I going to plant this year? On this field, what do I plant, and what on that? I think, 'do this', 'do this and that!' I lie awake. Do I plant maize on this field and afterwards wheat? Or garlic and then peas? What about that field over there? What work do I assign the women and children today? The oxen haven't grown very fat yet. But I want to sell them at Easter, so I need to rent some pasture. ... To get money, to show change, I think and think. I lie awake. If you don't think like that, you don't obtain any *gabinti* (development). These days, if you don't think, you're useless.

If what keeps people awake at night tells us something about their deepest concerns and aspirations, *gabinti* would seem to be of utmost importance to Kalibab. Indeed, the desire for *gabinti* was one of the most widely shared concerns among people in Dell and cut across religious, generational and gender cleavages. A term that literally translates as 'growth', *gabinti* on a first level means 'economic growth' or 'growth in wealth'. Beyond an increase

in wealth, the term also denotes a process of ‘change’ (*okmi*), an advancement from ‘backwardness’ to ‘modernity’ (*zemenawinet*). To capture this broader meaning of ‘*gabinti*’, I translate the term as ‘development’.

As Kalibab and others suggested to me, their concern with *gabinti* was a relatively recent phenomenon. This claim is well supported by other data, which permit to date the origins of the local engagement with development to the early 2000s.

Like elsewhere in southern Ethiopia, the 1990s in Dell were a time when traditional practice was in full swing (cf. Freeman 2002: 44 for Gamo). After the revolutionary abolition of feudalism in 1974, wealth levels had risen as people had started to cultivate more land and livestock was no longer taken away by Gamma landlords. With rising surpluses, traditional institutions expanded. The number of feasting groups multiplied, and during the 1990s even women joined these formerly all-male groups; funerals and weddings got longer and costlier, celebrations to create fictive kinship abounded, and work groups held lengthy feasts.

Since the early 2000s, however, people’s investments of time, wealth and concern have shifted significantly. They now prefer to buy modern goods like clothes, cell-phones and tin-roofed houses as well as to re-invest surpluses into profitable activities like cattle raising, growing cash crops or building and renting out a house in Dell’s main village. Meanwhile, the community as a whole has worked hard to improve its infrastructure. In 2001, the ramshackle huts housing the *kebele* administration were replaced by a spacious tin-roofed house. Since the late 2000s, the school was expanded by several new classrooms to accommodate the rising number of students – from a few dozen during the 1990s to 1039 in 2016. In 2014, the entire population of Dell, using hoes and spades, cleared a path to connect the main village (itself only founded in 2010) to the nearest road. And in 2016, *kebele* leaders bribed a dozer operator who was working on this road to make a detour into Dell territory. This coup has allowed the main village to be reached not only by motorbike but also by four-wheel drive truck. This, in turn, has stimulated some rich men to bring up the materials needed for pouring concrete floors, thus setting the latest trend in home improvement.

Since the early 2000s, then, Dell has undergone significant changes, as people have shifted their investments of energy from expanding traditional institutions to pursuing

economic progress in their personal lives and for the community at large.²¹ So successful has Dell been at development, that in January 2017 it was ranked first among the 48 *kebele* of South Aari district – a success which, for the first time in its history, brought a group of higher-level government officials and a television crew to Dell. Far from being a mere discourse or an ever elusive dream, development is something Dell people feel they are making real progress in, something that has already transformed their land in significant ways and that will do even more so in the future. How can we account for this? What has motivated people to change their economic practice so profoundly and to take up the pursuit of development? And in what way might this have contributed to what people lament as a decline of respect?

3.2 A Question of Power? Anthropological Approaches to Development

In the past few decades, anthropologists have mostly approached development in a spirit of critique. There are two key reasons. Firstly, they observed that development initiatives often do not achieve their stated aims of improving people's living conditions. Indeed, scholars have shown that such initiatives – whether large-scale state-led or participatory bottom-up – can even *increase* suffering (Scott 1998; Cooke and Kothari 2001, Karim 2011). Secondly, it was argued that while failing in its overt aims, development helps to expand state power, turn political questions into technical ones, and cement global relations of inequality (Ferguson 1994, Li 2007, Escobar 1995). In stressing issues of power, domination, and inequality, one could say with Ortner (2016), the anthropology of development has largely been situated in the realm of 'dark anthropology'.

Faced with the need to explain a developmental success story like Dell's, this intellectual tradition would advise to look for signs of coercion and resistance. If people pursue development, the assumption would be, they surely must have been forced to do so. This perspective suggests itself all the more for Dell given the broader political context: A state with 'entrenched habits of authoritarianism' (Clapham 2017: 2), Ethiopia has since the 2000s fashioned itself into a self-designated 'developmental state', which forcefully pushes for economic growth and transformation (Abbink 2017, Mains 2012).

Indeed, when I first came to Dell, I was struck by the power of the state. Contrary to what has been described for other African peripheries (e.g. Roitman 2004, Jones 2009), the

21 This mirrors the broader trend in Ethiopia, where GDP growth averaged 8.9% between 2000 and 2015 (Regasa et al. 2019: 2), making Ethiopia one of the fastest growing economies worldwide.

state in Dell is not ‘weak’ or ‘failing’ but strong and omnipresent – and always calling for development. Most striking in this regard is the so-called *cell*, a state institution established in 2007, which has since been people’s main interface with state developmentalism. There are 16 cells in Dell, grouping together around 40 neighbouring households each. The cells assemble on one morning per week at their respective meeting grounds, either to carry out communal work (*lemat*), or to be ‘given education’ (*timirt im*). In the latter case, a local state employee gives a talk on issues ranging from hygiene, family planning and agriculture to the importance of education, saving and stopping ‘wasteful’ expenditure. Participation in cell activities is obligatory, and absentees have to pay fines. Fines are also levied for non-compliance with other demands of the local state apparatus. Failure to register a child for school or refusal to buy government-provided seeds and fertilizer, conspicuous laziness or the extension of a funeral or wedding beyond the permitted three days, all are subject to fines – and sometimes garnished with a short stay in the local prison, a shed surrounded by some square metres of unkempt grass and a wobbly bamboo-fence.



Figure 9. Cells digging anti-erosion ditches in the context of communal work

Given the strength of the local state apparatus, it is perhaps understandable why I initially thought people's engagement with development had to be explained as the result of coercion by a powerful state. This also seemed to suggest itself in the light of other Ethiopianists' writings, which emphasize issues of power and domination (Planel 2014, Di Nunzio 2015, Emmenegger 2016). From the beginning, however, this perspective faced the difficulty that this just was not the way Dell people themselves talked about development and the state. Much as I tried to elicit critical comments, no one seemed particularly interested in development-bashing. Even those who had recently paid a fine or spent a sleepless night in the local prison did not critique development per se. Rather than expressions of 'resistance', the acts which had got them punished turned out to be results of particular circumstances: the need to keep a child at home to take care of a younger sibling rather than opposition to school education; a dire lack of cash not a rejection of fertilizer; a visit to a sick aunt rather than general refusal to partake in communal work and pursue infrastructural improvement. In fact, most of my interlocutors spoke enthusiastically about development and thanked the government for having 'taught' them about it. They suggested that through development their land had *usta* – 'improved' or 'become beautiful'. And many a times I heard people exclaim with gratitude that 'now good days have come to us!'

Of course, from the perspective of a hard-nosed 'power functionalism' (Sahlins 2008: 321), such statements could be discounted as just another indication of how state power brings people to not only act in certain prescribed ways but also to think, feel and desire accordingly (e.g. de Vries 2007). Yet, I worry that this would betray my ethnography. To take Dell people's enthusiasm about development seriously, then, we need an alternative to power-based explanations.

Anand Pandian (2008) has started to offer such an alternative. Based on his ethnography from a south Indian community where development and more specifically 'toil' is taken as a form of ethical self-formation, Pandian argues that while

'development can be identified as a series of obligations imposed upon postcolonial subjects by state agencies, economic compulsions, and social elites ... development may also be understood as a moral telos toward which individuals and collectives direct themselves through a critical reworking of their own natures.' (2008: 164).

The point is as simple as it is important: In some places, development may be part of a broader ethical project and valued for helping to realize locally meaningful ends (see also Miller 2015). In such cases, the key question is not what forces people to pursue

development but why they might wish to do so – what they value about development, what motivates them to pursue it, what they find attractive about it. As I will show in the following, it is this latter perspective which accounts best for my ethnography.

In a first step, I examine the motives people in Dell give for the pursuit of development. I show that today's quest to 'grow' economically is motivated by a desire to 'grow' one's 'name'. In a second step, I note that having a name has long been an important value for people in Dell, but that it previously used to be realized through wealth in people and sponsoring feasts. I go on to argue that Dell people have started to engage with development because they conceive of it as a better way to build reputation. This is because the modern goods which development affords are associated with the Gamma (Northern Ethiopians), and, indeed, are thought to turn their owners into Gamma themselves. Gamma, however, are understood to be superior to Aari, and so to become Gamma means to gain in reputation or name. As with conversion to Evangelicalism, however, the use of a new means to better realize an old end came at a cost. In the final part of the chapter, I show how the pursuit of name through development draws away resources from kinship and commensality. This makes it more difficult to cultivate the kinds of relations and interactions in which respect (*bonshmi*) can be realized. And while people value development as a means to build reputation, they are also keenly aware of the challenges that it poses to treating each other respectfully.

3.3 Building Name through Development

One breezy Sunday afternoon, as I passed through the main village on my way home from church, I came across my friend Aftamo. Aftamo was standing in front of a house, which he had finished building a few days earlier. I invited Aftamo (who was *alem* at that time and later became Orthodox) to have a drink in a near-by bar and thus learnt more about his house. Aftamo explained that this was not a house he intended to live in – he had already built a *corcora* (tin-roofed house) for himself some years ago – but that it was to be rented out. As was true for many of the other 30 or so houses that made up the village, someone would establish a small bar in it and Aftamo would receive a monthly rent of 200 Birr. Picking up on this fact, I playfully observed that he was soon going to be 'eating a salary' (*damos its*; a local idiom for any kind of regular cash income, carrying connotations of ease

and wealth). Yes, Aftamo said, there would be a salary, to be sure. ‘But’, he added after a slight pause,

‘above all this house will be of use for my name. You see, now already people are talking, “Aftamo has built a house, Aftamo has built a house! He must be wealthy or what? He is wealthy!” But only wait until someone has opened a bar in it. On market days a great many people will pass by. When it rains, people will enter my house. They will drink something, they will look around. “Whose house is this?” they’ll ask. In the evening, when they get home, when they get back to their land, they will tell their people, “I was in Dell today, I was in the house of *Gash* Aftamo”. They will speak my name. Only wait and see how they’ll speak it!’

For Aftamo, the key point about his house is the name it will afford him. It may have some economic benefit in bringing him a rent income. But what really matters is that it has got people to talk about him admiringly – and that it is likely to elicit even more admiring talk once people from more distant areas come to notice it.

Aftamo’s account is typical. ‘It’s good for your name’, was an answer I heard many times when asking people about their motives for pursuing modern goods like tin-roofed houses. This is not to say that this was their only motive or the only explanation I got. Sometimes people would point to the comfort associated with a certain good, or they would talk about the security it afforded. Tin-roofed house are good because they do not burn down as easily as straw-thatched huts. And if you own a motorbike, the townsman who has rented it from you will come to pick you up and bring you to the hospital if you are ill. Yet, such idioms of comfort and security hardly abounded. And even where people did mention such advantages, talk usually came around to the topic of name before long.

A concern with name was also driving Doba when I caught up with him one day on a narrow path in the middle of Dell. Doba was sweating profusely under the weight of three pieces of timber and gratefully accepted my offer to carry one of them. He explained that he had been going back and forth all day between his compound and Arki area, where someone was selling timber for house construction at 15 Birr a piece. I knew Doba as someone who never missed out on a traditional wedding, funeral or *shishi*, where one would see him for days on end, happily drunk, playing *woissa* pipes with a group of friends, or stomping his feet frenetically in a round of *guzza*. He was not the first one to come to mind when thinking about people keen to ‘grow’ and ‘show change’. But here he was, sweating away in the early November sun and telling me about his plan to replace his hut with a tin-roofed house. Asked why he wanted to have such a house, Doba’s concise answer was that he did not want

his age-mates to laugh about him (*godj jintshaybish*). He imitated how they had already started questioning him: ‘You have some cattle, you have some money, so why don’t you build a *corcora*, why don’t you show any change?’ And he added that, ‘they belittle you if you live in a hut.’

Doba’s reasoning is somewhat different from Aftamo’s. While Aftamo fantasizes about the wave of admiration his new house is likely to trigger, Doba motivates his quest for a tin-roofed house in terms of avoiding ‘laughter’ (*jintersheri*) and ‘belittlement’ (*toksi*). Where Aftamo has his eyes set on fame or obtaining a ‘heavy name’ (*detzminda nami*), Doba is trying to avoid shame (*oshin*). The underlying concern, however, is similar: Aftamo and Doba are both concerned with how others think and speak about them, with how they are evaluated by their peers and wider society. Both wish to be held in regard and to be esteemed, rather than to go unnoticed or even become a laughing stock. In brief, both are concerned with what people in Dell call ‘name’. And for both, this concern is closely intertwined with the pursuit of modern goods.

Now, the pursuit of such goods is a key part of what people in Dell understand by ‘*gabinti*’; and other people (including women, see below) also motivated their quest for such goods in terms of name. Taken together this is a first hint that in Dell development is driven by people’s concern with having a name – by their desire, that is, to not be laughed at but to be admired and to be considered ‘great’ (*gaesha*). To substantiate this hypothesis, I will now examine in more detail what people understand by *gabinti* and how exactly they assess name.

Climbing the Development Ladder

To understand what people in Dell mean by *gabinti*, it is useful to go back to the notion of ‘plan’ (*ikid*) mentioned by Kalibab in the introduction to this chapter. It was a shared understanding among my interlocutors that in the past people did not really make ‘plans’, but that today – having been taught about this by the government – all but the incurably lazy had ‘plans’. Their plans were something people frequently talked about among themselves. I also made it a habit to ask people about their plans, once I had come to realize how important this concept was to them. Take Mathos as an example. In his late 30s or early 40s, Mathos was among the poorest people in Dell. He explained:

‘Right now, I don’t have a single lamb. But I have entered an *iqub* (rotating savings association). When I eat the *iqub* [collect the kitty], I’ll buy a lamb. Then, growing, growing, it becomes a sheep, it gives birth to lambs. When they have grown, I sell them and buy a heifer. The heifer will calve. I grow the bull-calves... So I become a *wakibab* (cattle owner). When I have four oxen, I sell two of them; two are for ploughing. From this [money] I build a *corcora*. If you ask about my plan, this is my plan.’

Other people had similarly detailed notions of the steps they hoped to take next. What those steps were depended on their current wealth level. Those who had managed to get some oxen and a tin-roofed house, talked about how they were saving money to buy a plot of land in the main village or in Gob or Jinka, and how they would then build a ‘townhouse’ (*katema eja*) on that plot. Those who already owned such a house, in turn, planned to build yet another house or to buy a motorbike, which they could rent out to someone in town. Yet further up the wealth ladder, people aspired to join the small group of those who had managed to set up a diesel engine flour mill in Dell or a neighbouring area. And the five or six men who had accomplished this, in turn, all talked about wanting to be the first to buy an *Isuzu* truck. In all cases, people – in a way similar to that of Mathos – spoke about how they would save income (such as rents from houses, or money gained by operating a flour mill, or gains from selling produce) through an *iqub* or by purchasing livestock, and how they would do so until they had accumulated enough wealth to carry out the next step in their plan.

What we have here, then, is an understanding of development as a series of ‘value transformations’ (Munn 1986) that lead to ever more valuable assets. These value transformations are pursued over the life course. One starts out as a teenager with nothing but one’s own labour power. A handful of onions grown in the corner of one’s father’s field bring some first cash, and after a while one may be able to buy a lamb and thus lay the foundation for further livestock. After marriage, and obtaining their own field, men concentrate on saving wealth to build a tin-roofed house in their compound, which is gradually furnished with chairs, a table, and eventually a solar lamp and a mattress. Meanwhile they save to move up to the next rung of the development ladder, which is to build a townhouse; and from there they seek to acquire further rent-generating assets. Women, in turn, strive to ‘grow’ by investing money (gained through small-scale trading or selling produce) in sheep or saving it in rotating savings associations; eventually this wealth

is transformed into different kinds of clothes and household utensils. Lack of resources prevents most women from moving up much higher on the development ladder. They are clearly desirous to do so, however, and toward the end of my fieldwork the first few women had managed to build their own small tin-roofed house in their husband's compound.

If development amounts to a ladder that one climbs over time, the magnitude of one's name mainly depends on how far and how fast one climbs this ladder. Broadly speaking, it is true that the higher up one is on the ladder, the greater one's name. In Dell, it is those men who own a mill, townhouses and a motorbike, who are considered to have the greatest name, whereas those who live in a hut hardly have any name at all.²² However, it is not only one's absolute position on the development ladder that matters but also how one stands relative to one's age-mates. Consider Doba and Aftamo again. Doba faces the threat of laughter because he is lagging behind his age-mates, many of whom have already built a tin-roofed house. By contrast, a young man who has recently married will not face the threat of laughter for not yet owning a tin-roofed house since it is normal for people to only build such a house some years after marriage. Aftamo, in turn, receives a lot of admiration because he is ahead of his age-mates: while many have their personal *corcora*, few have moved up to the next level of building a townhouse, and thus Aftamo is ahead of the field. In absolute terms, Aftamo is 'smaller' than the richest men in Dell, but the speed at which he is climbing the development ladder earns him extra admiration.

This system of assessing reputation based on developmental progress obviously presupposes that people know about each other's possessions. And this is very much the case in Dell. I was often astonished by the detailed knowledge people had about such things as the number of cattle someone owned, how many chairs of the most prestigious type they had at home, whether or not they had already installed a ceiling in their townhouse (which allows asking higher rent) or how much money they could expect to receive from a savings association they participated in (see Haynes 2017: 12 for similar observations from the Copperbelt). While this knowledge was most extensive for those who lived relatively close by, people also worked to deepen their knowledge about the property of those living farther

22 In the next chapter, we will see that for those who 'serve' in church there is the possibility to build name through being exemplary and highly engaged Christians. More generally, I do not wish to deny that in Dell there also exist other metrics than development to assess reputation, and that when assessing any given person's reputation people will combine several of these. Yet, development is by far the most important metric. This is indicated not least by the fact that when you ask someone about another person's name, they will spontaneously always respond by talking about how the other performs in terms of development (rather than, say, how virtuous they are).

away. Whenever I walked with people through areas they did not pass through every day (going to a funeral, for instance), they would take close notice of cattle, fields and houses, asking each other or those whom they met on the path, ‘whose oxen is that one over there?’ or ‘who built this new *corcora*?’ or ‘what do you think how much he is going to get for selling these beetroots?’.

The suggestion that Dell people wish to acquire wealth for the sake of building name is unlikely to surprise anthropologists. After all, the ethnographic record is full of cases where people strive for wealth as a means to gain reputation. There is one important regard, however, in which the case of Dell differs from what we are used to, when thinking about the link between wealth and reputation. As we have seen, in Dell the most prestigious goods are townhouses, motorbikes and mills – goods, that is, which bring rent and afford further economic growth. This contrasts with systems where reputation is gained by putting wealth to economically unproductive use – by giving it away, using it to purchase luxury goods or destroying it (Veblen 2005: 52, Friedman 1994: 128f.; Mauss 1966: 12). To be sure, Dell people do not use *all* of their wealth ‘productively’. To buy a mattress, a suit or a cellphone, is to spend wealth on goods that do not produce further wealth; the same applies for replacing one’s hut with a tin-roofed house. But while to own such consumption goods is part of what is required to build a name, a *great* name can only be built through the above mentioned investment goods. Indeed, it would be outright detrimental to someone’s name if they had sufficient resources to, say, build a townhouse, but instead spent this wealth on, say, furniture for their own house. This was not only explicitly suggested by my interlocutors. It also manifested in the fact that while there were huge differences between people in terms of the investment goods they owned, there was much less difference between them in terms of consumption goods. The clothes or the household furnishings of the richest people in Dell hardly differed from those of people who lived in a tin-roofed house but owned no further assets. In brief, name in Dell is not primarily built through conspicuous consumption but through investing in things that permit further growth. This, I argue, is what drives development in Dell.

There is one exception which proves the rule. Around 2006, the government introduced a new institution to Dell: auctions (*tsharata*). Today, such auctions are regularly held both in state contexts, such as in school at the end of the school year, and in evangelical and Orthodox churches. During a *tsharata*, men bid for goods like a rope, a bucket, or a

sheep. The atmosphere during such auctions is intense. A large crowd forms a tight circle around the auctioneer. At first, many bid, but soon there is but a handful of men left, who engage into a rapid and boisterous bidding competition. The winner steps into the circle, takes out a conspicuously large bundle of 100 Birr notes, and counts off what he is due. This is always a multiple of the market value: a rope worth 25 Birr may be sold at 400; a sheep worth 1000 Birr may go for 5000. Asked about why they participated in auctions, everyone was clear that this was to build their name. For instance, Dauli, one of Kalibab's sons, explained that while he did not even own a tin-roofed house yet, he already had something of a name because he had once won in an auction against a much richer person, paying 800 Birr for a lamb that was worth no more than 200. 'When I got home that night', Dauli recalled, 'I looked at the lamb and thought, "Oy! For 800 I could have bought four of these. But damn it, this is my name!"' In the case of auctions, then, people use their wealth in what, from their own perspective, is an economically unproductive way (which supports the claim that they ultimately desire name not wealth). However, this does not contradict my argument that the quest to have a name drives development in Dell. This is because the money generated through auctions is used by the organizing churches or state institutions to finance their own development, e.g. to build a new classroom. In other words, men here gain a name through contributing wealth to the development of the community – it is their desire to gain a name that drives communal development.²³

23 I did not see women bid in auctions. The women whom I asked about this said that even though they found the idea thrilling, it was safer not to participate in auctions in order to not risk conflict with one's husband. Some time before my fieldwork, I was told, there had once been a woman who had participated and won in an auction. This woman had afterwards been beaten up by her husband, who felt that she had outshone him. This points us to the fact that while women strive for name, too, their striving is curtailed by their husband's expectation to always be 'greater' than them.



Figure 10. During an auction organized by the local school, a successful bidder (right) comes to collect the sheep he has just purchased

On Name and Respect

If development in Dell is to be explained as the result of people's desire to gain a name, it would be good to also know why they care to gain a name. There are two ways to answer this. From a historical point of view, there is evidence that the concern with name is a long-standing one, which predates the engagement with development. From this perspective, the question is not why people want to gain a name, but how they came to conceive of

development as a good means to this end. I will address this question in the next section. But one can also answer the question why they care to have a name by noting the close connection between this value and that other value which we saw Dell people care greatly about, *bonshmi*.

In Chapter 1 I explained that *bonshmi* denotes a kind of respect that necessarily expresses itself in concrete acts, like bowing, using honorifics, offering a chair, or ‘begging’ someone. To make this point I also noted that linguistically *bonshmi* is nothing one can *have* – whether in the sense of ‘personal honour’ or ‘an attitude of respect toward someone’ – but something that is shown or received. By contrast, *nami* cannot be shown or received. It is nothing that one does, but something that one has or that one thinks others have.

In Chapter 1 I also noted that philosophers who have written about respect commonly draw a distinction between respect as attitude and respect as action (cf. Dillon 2016). Against this background, it would be possible to conceptualize *bonshmi* and *nami* as two sides of the same coin of respect. On this account, *bonshmi* would be respect as action and *nami* respect as attitude. To conceptualize *bonshmi* and *nami* as two sides of the same concern – as two sub-values of an overarching value of ‘respect’ – would also seem possible in light of the fact that they share the same disvalue: ‘belittlement’ or disrespect. An act of disrespect is no less called ‘*toksi*’ than to cast aspersions on someone behind their back, i.e. to question their name.

If in this thesis I have decided to use the term ‘respect’ only for *bonshmi*, rather than as a category that encompasses *bonshmi* and *nami*, this is because I wanted to follow Dell people’s own usage. They clearly conceive of *bonshmi* and *nami* as two distinct values and have no term that encompasses them. Nonetheless, it is helpful to note the close connections between *nami* and *bonshmi* to understand why people care so greatly about their name. After all, where people are desirous to be treated respectfully it does not come as a surprise if they also desire to be held in high regard.

3.4 Name in the Past

The desire to have a name is not new but also existed in the past. The ways to get a name, however, differed. Based on my interlocutors’ accounts, two main ways can be distinguished: having wealth in people and sponsoring feasts.

First, to have many wives, children, affines and fictive kin constituted someone as ‘great’. Such a person was referred to as a ‘father of children’ (*jintsibab*), or ‘a man with many relatives’ (*sosa kit bedemibab*), or was simply said to ‘have many people’ (*ed kit bedie*). We can refer to this as ‘wealth in people’ (cf. Guyer 1995: 84), an expression apposite for its double-meaning. Suggesting a quantity, or wealth *of* people, it also points to the wealth invested or expressed *in* people. Wealth is needed to marry several wives, to raise a large-number of children, or to sponsor feasts to create fictive kinship. And so in Dell, as in many others part of Africa, people were a key form and index of wealth, and thus a source of name.

Sponsoring feasts was a second way to gain a name. A person who excelled at this was admiringly referred to as an *edem itsidab* – someone who feeds others. The phenomenon is well-documented across southern Ethiopia. Freeman (2002: Chapter 5) writes about the Gamo highlands where men traditionally strove to acquire a series of increasingly prestigious titles by sponsoring increasingly large feasts. And the mid-20th century ethnographers of the German Frobenius Institute considered ‘feasts of merit’ as one of the three elements of a broader ‘meritorious complex’ (cf. Braukämper 2015) marking the cultures of southern Ethiopia. It is true that traditional Aari culture had neither a system of titles nor institutionalized ‘festivities on occasion of the possession of a certain number of cattle, buffaloes or pigs’ (ibid.: 209). But the basic idea of magnifying one’s name through sponsoring feasts is evident in traditional Aari institutions, too.

Funerals are a good example. In Chapter 1 I described how at the death of a senior affine, a man would prepare beer and invite others to follow him to the funeral. The more beer he prepared, the more people he could attract and the longer he could entertain them at the funeral. Thus entertained, the group would engage into boisterous dancing. And the more it did so – the greater and longer the uproar it created – the greater their host’s name. By the same logic, name was built through participating in a *siri* feasting group, offering a feast to establish fictive kinship, or, indeed, by showing lavish hospitality to those coming to attend one’s work party (*dabba*). As my neighbour Agero recounted:

‘There used to be a man here in the area, called Gultzibab. Beer never disappeared from his house. All the time he was preparing beer, and he often called for *dabba*. People came and drank his beer and filled their stomachs. The beer was made from different types of grain: maize, wheat, sorghum. It was very tasty. People spoke his name a lot, “he gave us a lot of tasty beer, he hosted us for two days”, they said.’

Like people, feasts require and thus index wealth. But contrary to people, feasts are ephemeral. To counter-act this and perpetuate their name, men who had sponsored feasts displayed in prominent places the horns, jaws or skulls of the animals they had ‘fed’ to others; placing the skull of an ox at the entrance of their compound, for instance, or tying goat horns to the centre-post of the hut in which they entertained visitors. In the past, then, no less than in the present, one required wealth to build a name. But the form wealth had to take in order to actually afford a name differed. Not tin-roofed houses or mills made a person’s name, not wealth in things, but wealth in people and sponsoring feasts.

Now, it would be wrong to suggest that these older standards for evaluating name have completely disappeared from Dell. They are, to be sure, vehemently rejected by Evangelicals and by the younger and more educated people. But older people, and notably those who follow *karta*, still think that offering a feast and having many dependents is rather good for your name. But even for these people, the newer standards have become dominant. This is indicated not only by their gradual withdrawal from or down-sizing of traditional institutions, which are felt to stand at odds with the pursuit of development and thus of name in its modern form (see below). It also became evident in how they evaluated others. It was a shared understanding among my *alem* friends, for instance, that elders like Eaybab or Wodibab did not have a name. These two men are both in their seventies, have several wives, countless children, and are rich in land, cattle, grain and money. Yet, as Betsi, a man in his 40s explained to me: ‘Wodibab has a box full of money, he has many granaries, and they are full even during the rainy season [a time of shortage], he has at least 14 oxen and 4 milk cows. But he doesn’t have a name. Why? Because he hasn’t built a house in the village. He could easily do it, so why doesn’t he?’ And Alkemat, who is in his 60s, mused about a recently deceased neighbour: ‘It’s too bad he didn’t build a tin-roofed house. You know, had he wanted to, had he thought a little, he could easily have done so. But now there is nothing to show his name.’

Name, to summarize, has long been an important concern for people in Dell. In the past, however, the pursuit of name went through creating relations and sponsoring feasts, not through modern goods; hence it did not entail development. So how did modern goods become the standard for evaluating name? The question is essential. For while the quest for name may explain people’s current pursuit of development, we also have to understand how they came to think of development as a suitable and indeed superior means to the end of

name in the first place. A good way to approach this question is to look at the history of that modern good which for many in Dell is the epitome of development: the tin-roofed house.

3.5 Becoming Gamma Through Gamma Goods

The first attempt to build a tin-roofed house ended in disaster. Banti was the son of a wealthy farmer, who had been one of the few locals to own land prior to the 1974 revolution. His father had given Banti several fertile fields, and he had also made money by trading honey between Maale and Gob. Already quite wealthy in his mid-30s, Banti, around 1982, began to make preparations to build a *corcora*. It was an unheard-of move. No one in Dell owned such a house, and the only people known to do so were Gamma. Starting under Haile Selassie, some of the northern landlords had built tin-roofed houses in Jinka and Gob, which people from Dell had seen when going to town. Kalibab, for example, recalls how as a teenage boy his father sent him to Jinka, to pay taxes to their landlord Zerfo. ‘He lived in a big tin-roofed house, even the kitchen [house] was a *corcora*!’ Kalibab told me, still visibly impressed half a century later. But *corcoras*’ exclusive association with the Gamma notwithstanding, in 1982 Banti assiduously bought roofing sheets in Jinka, transported them to Dell by horse, and finally built his house in 1983. He was to have only little time to enjoy it, though, since after less than a year opposition formed. There had been a severe lack of rain and people blamed Banti’s house for the drought. ‘When you build a tin-roofed house, the land becomes white’ (*corcora iksink, pitshana tsamtsamde*), they said, linking the shiny ‘whiteness’ of the metal roof to the ‘whiteness’ of the scorched earth and the glaring sun.²⁴ Soon, the community – with the *kebele* chairperson’s approval – required Banti to take his house apart. This he did perforce, selling the roofing sheets to a Gamma in Gob. It took almost two more decades until the next attempt to build a *corcora* was made. This time, however, it was a complete success. In 2001, Ayro, a younger brother of Banti’s was elected chairperson. Soon after taking office, Ayro energetically proposed to replace with a tin-roofed house the ramshackle huts in which the *kebele* administration had resided so far, and which had fallen into disrepair during the decade that the *kebele* had been administered from Bako (cf. Introduction). He observed that a neighbouring *kebele* had already built such a house and reasoned that it would be bad for the name of Dell if they did not draw level. He assembled people for communal work, and in a concerted effort the house was built. Some

24 Like many other languages, Aari’af only distinguishes the colours black, red and white.

weeks later, Ayro also built a *corcora* for himself, and soon others followed suit. In the following years, the number of tin-roofed houses increased exponentially, and in 2016 about 45% of married men owned one. During the same period, many other goods started to make inroads, and the pursuit of development took off.

So how can we explain this shift? How did people move from rejecting tin-roofed houses to desiring them? My argument is in two steps. Let us begin by trying to understand the rejection of Banti's house. Recall that people blamed his house for a drought. Now, the customary explanation for an excess of sun or rain relates to illicit sexual relations, either incestuous or between *manna* and *xantsa* (low- and high-caste). This suggests that people interpreted the house as a taboo-violation, as the crossing of a boundary that was not to be crossed. To see why it should have made sense for them to think this way, two things need to be known. First, *corcora* were firmly associated with the Gamma, who were the only people known to live in such houses. In fact, Dell people to this day refer to modern goods at large as 'Gamma things' – a point which will become important below. Second, people have long thought of the difference between themselves and the Gamma in analogy to that between *manna* and *xantsa*, considering the Gamma as both essentially different and superior. If we take these two views together, we can understand why people should have thought that building a tin-roofed house is like infringing a taboo – not all that different from a *manna* having sexual relations with a *xantsa*.

There is another way to put this. Bourdieu draws our attention to what he calls 'sense of one's place', meaning the 'practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits ... which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded' (1984: 471). In other words, a sense of one's place leads to the rejection of what one thinks one cannot obtain anyway. It is the practical sense which makes people say 'that's not for the likes of us' (1977: 77). Dell people's rejection of Banti's tin-roofed house, I argue, can be seen as the result and expression of such a sense of one's place. For not only did they consider themselves inferior to the Gamma. But – like the difference between *manna* and *xantsa* – the difference between Aari and Gamma was considered set in stone, a fact of nature that could not be altered. As we heard *godmi* Worka suggest in Chapter 1, 'you can't lengthen a thumb by pulling at it.' Given the impossibility for an Aari to become Gamma, there was no point in pretending to do so by building a *corcora*. School education, in fact, was rejected along similar lines.

Going to school, people said, just did not lead anywhere, because it was inconceivable for an Aari to ever do anything other than ‘dig in the mud’, let alone get into government employment. Education, like *corcora*, simply was ‘not for the likes of us’. The same idea underlies notions like the one that wearing shoes (another quintessential Gamma thing) undermines ritual efficacy, so that shoes need to be taken off whenever carrying out rituals, or the notion that Satan dwells in the engines of mills, making it dangerous to approach these.

I have argued that people in the past rejected certain goods because these were identified with the Gamma; a rejection motivated in a language of harm – of tin-roofed houses causing droughts, education being a dead end and shoes undermining ritual efficacy. If this line of reasoning is accepted, the question arises as to how people came to pursue the very goods which they had previously rejected. In asking this question, it is important to note that the earlier rejection did *not* mean that people considered Gamma goods as worthless. Contrary to 18th century Chinese aristocrats who just could not see anything valuable and admirable about the manufactured goods presented to them by British diplomats (cf. Sahlin 1988: 10f.), Dell people did admire tin-roofed houses or mills. These were *rirshdinda rej*, ‘admirable things’, ‘things that made you afraid’, with fear (*bashi*) being a local idiom for the sensations of awe and reverence experienced in the face of something superior. The real question, therefore, is not how people came to perceive modern goods as having value, but how they came to think it proper and desirable for themselves to appropriate these valuables.

My main argument here relates to the broader political changes that occurred in Ethiopia during the 1990s and the sense of possibility these entailed in Dell. As Abbink explains, one of the ‘core principles instituted by the post-1991 government in Ethiopia... was ethnic-based federalism’ (2011: 596). This model made ethnic identity the basis of politics, institutionally recognized the identities of previously non-dominant peoples, and asserted the equality of all ethnic groups (ibid.). After a long time during which Orthodox Christian groups from the North had dominated the rest of the country, presenting their culture as the pinnacle of civilization, ethnic federalism encouraged previously subdued ethnic groups to cultivate their own cultures and languages.

Interestingly, people in Dell understood this discourse of ethnic federalism as an invitation and encouragement to ‘become Gamma’. Former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi

himself, as was explained to me, had told them, ‘Aari, become Gamma!’ (*Aari jetta Gamma matkate*). At first view, this could be dismissed as a misunderstanding – people simply had not grasped the new message of ethnic equality. But this is not so. People did pick up the notion that all groups are equal (*yekka*); only that they understood ‘equality’ in one sense rather than another – as ‘ontological equality’, rather than as ‘equal worth’ (Turner 1986: 34; cf. Robbins 1994: 33).

A notion of equal worth of Aari and Gamma is absent to this day. There continues to be a pronounced sense of inferiority, and I was often struck by how readily my interlocutors described themselves in comparison to the Gamma as ignorant, backwards, lacking in cleverness, and even in hygiene.²⁵ What did change, however, was the perception of the nature of the boundary between the two groups. Where this boundary was previously deemed insurmountable, the message of equality and the government’s purported encouragement for Aari to become Gamma ushered in a sense of possibility. Ontologically equal to the Gamma, Aari could in principle become Gamma themselves. Crucially, it was precisely through the consumption of modern goods that Dell people understood they could achieve this transformation. This understanding makes sense since, as noted above, goods like trousers, tin-roofed houses or mills are considered as ‘Gamma goods’.

From what I have said so far, it may seem clear why to become Gamma should have been attractive to people. It is important, however, to distinguish two reasons. A first, frequently given reason is voiced by Kxaukibab, a man in his early 70s. During an interview on the changes he had witnessed during his lifetime, Kxaukibab said with real gratitude:

‘In the past, we Aari didn’t have a name. The Gamma belittled us, they laughed at us. But now development has come to our land, and we have grown our name. We wear good clothes, we live in tin-roofed houses. Now Aari become Gamma. So who is to belittle us now? Truly, good days have come to us!’

On this account, to ‘become Gamma’ through modern consumption means to improve one’s name vis-à-vis the ‘real’ Gamma. This must be understood against the background that the Christian Northerners who had conquered the area around the turn of the 20th century as well

25 In the same vein, Evangelicals, harking back to Genesis 9: 18-27, explained to me that the Aari were descendants of Ham, and the Gamma of Shem. Since Ham had laughed at his father, Noah, when finding him drunk and naked, God had blessed Ham’s descendants ‘only with mud’. But Ham’s brother, Shem, had respectfully covered his father’s nudity, and so with God’s blessing the Gamma were able to wear at all times the white *gabi* (a vestment associated with Orthodox Christians) and to work ‘by pen’ or ‘by money’ rather than to ‘dig in the mud’.

as their descendants had looked down on local people for their low level of material wealth and technology – for sleeping on the floor rather than on a bed, for wearing clothes made from sheep skin or plant materials, for going bare-foot. To acquire clothes, a mattress, a tin-roofed house and so on is therefore thought to make one more respectable in the eyes of these Northerners. It means to have a name where one did not use to have one.²⁶

At the same time, consumption of ‘Gamma things’ also helps to magnify one’s name within the community of Dell. Gamma being deemed ‘greater’ than Aari, to ‘become Gamma’ is to gain in status. Of course, not everyone who owns a pair of trousers is immediately considered a Gamma. Rather, it were only the wealthiest people in Dell whom I actually heard being referred to as having ‘become Gamma’. And in any case it is certainly less a matter of *being or not being* than of being *more or less* Gamma – the transition is continuous, not dichotomous. Yet, while not everyone may actually progress very far at becoming Gamma, everyone has to reckon with the fact that ownership in modern goods is now the dominant standard for assessing name. In being associated with the purportedly superior Gamma, modern goods are more prestigious than traditional uses of wealth coded as ‘Aari’. Hence, to invest in the latter is suboptimal from the point of view of name.

3.6 The Conflict between Respect and Reputation

Dell people’s quest for development, I have argued, is driven by their desire to have a name. But how exactly do they pursue development? We have seen their understanding of development as a series of steps that lead to ever more valuable and profitable assets – so what do they practically do to take these steps, to move from one rung of the development ladder to the next? And what are the consequences of working toward name in this way, rather than in the old way? We know from Chapter 1 that feasts and kinship are important for *bonshmi*. So what happens to *bonshmi* if feasts and kinship are no longer important for building name? In this final section, I examine these questions by, in turn, taking a closer look at economic production and consumption.

26 At this point my argument has some resonance with Sahlins’ (1992) and Robbins’ (2005) argument on ‘humiliation’ as a cause of economic take-off (cf. Introduction). Note, though, that there is an important difference. On my reading, Sahlins and Robbins suggest that through humiliation people first come to hate their old values and then adopt new values in their place. In Dell, however, the old value of *nam* has not been questioned or replaced. Rather, all that people did here was to take up a new, and in their view better way to realize this established value.

Rationalizing Production

As a way into this analysis, let us return to Aftamo, whom we have met above marvelling at his new townhouse. To build this house, Aftamo had relied on the labour of a group of four men from *Gayl*, an area further into the highlands that is known for its poor soils and harsh living conditions. The men were experienced and skilled builders, and Aftamo had settled with them on a fixed price of 3200 Birr. The four men were assisted by two young men from Dell, charged with menial tasks, each of whom Aftamo paid a daily wage of 90 Birr. The work was completed in two and a half days. Aftamo explained to me that he could also have built the house by way of *dabba*. This would have meant slaughtering two sheep, preparing bread, brewing beer and *Karibo* (a sugary drink preferred by Evangelicals), and ‘begging’ (*miks*) his neighbours and relatives to come and help him. There was nothing wrong with *dabba*, Aftamo said. On the contrary, it was a highly enjoyable affair with plenty of eating, drinking and joking. But then again you always had people whose ‘main plan [was] to fill their stomachs’, rather than to work, and so work often dragged on for longer than technically necessary. Moreover, Aftamo explained, building the house by way of *contrat* was cheaper than calling for *dabba*. The value of the two sheep and the grain used for making food would have come to no less than 4200 Birr, exceeding the 3650 Birr he had ended up paying to the cash labourers.

Aftamo’s decision to draw on cash labour rather than on *dabba*, reflects a wider trend of change in Dell. Together with *mol’a*, a second type of co-operative labour, *dabba* in the past accounted for roughly half of economic production, the other half being carried out by domestic groups. This is suggested by my interviews on how production was organized throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Donham (1994: 123) offers similar numbers for 1970s Maale. *Dabba* was used for a variety of tasks, from clearing forest, to ploughing, weeding and harvesting, to building and thatching huts. Depending on the amount of work, *dabba* lasted for one or two days, and there would be around 12-15 people. My interlocutors suggested that they on average participated in someone’s *dabba* once every two weeks, and that they themselves called for *dabba* twice a year. At present, however, *dabba* has all but disappeared: It is no longer used for agricultural production, and in the domain of house-building it is increasingly superseded by cash labour.

This is all the more surprising for the high value that used to be placed on *dabba* for being an enjoyable form of working together. Contrary to *mol’a*, work in the context of

dabba was less tightly controlled. There were more frequent and longer breaks, during which people would sit in the shade of a tree, drinking beer and ‘smiling together’; after work the group would move to its host’s house to drink more beer and dance *guzza*. Due to this festive character, being called – or, as people put it ‘begged’ – to attend someone’s *dabba* was something invitees were happy about. And as Gamibab asserted, ‘you called above all those whom you liked’. At the same time, to convene *dabba* placed an obligation on the host to attend in return the *dabba* of those who had worked for him. Thus, *dabba* was a form of economic production that regularly brought together a group of neighbours and relatives, provided an occasion for affectionate and respectful interactions, and reproduced relations among the participants.

So what explains the decline of *dabba*? People’s own explanations for this trend usually echoed Aftamo’s reasoning: *dabba* requires a greater expenditure of time and wealth than alternative forms of production and therefore appears wasteful. Some also mentioned the issue of obligations. Betsi, for instance, asserted, ‘If I call you for *dabba* today, you will call me for *dabba* tomorrow [in the future]. But maybe I have another plan on that day. I want to go to the market, or I need to weed my garlic. So if you call me, it’s a problem.’ This latter explanation points in the same direction as the former: *dabba* is economically disadvantageous because it hinders you from attending to your own economic projects and bringing them to fruition. As people often explained to me, these days everyone was pursuing a greater variety of economic projects – trading, cattle raising, and growing cash crops had come on top of cultivating grain. This required an amount of ‘running’ (*hass*) back and forth between projects which was incompatible with being bound to a cycle of *dabba* exchanges (or, for that matter, to the fixed schedule of a *mol’a* work group).

Dabba has declined, then, because people have come to perceive it as economically wasteful – a perception they did not have in the past. This shift in the evaluation of *dabba* needs to be understood against the background of the shift in how reputation is assessed. As long as sponsoring feasts was one key way to gain name, *dabba* harmonized with the end of building reputation. By showing lavish hospitality to your guests – using a variety of grain to produce tasty beer and hosting them well into the evening – you showed your generosity and readiness to ‘feed’ others. In fact, the very act of convening *dabba* benefited your name: not everyone could afford to convene *dabba* and hence doing so indexed your wealth. But with the shift in how name is assessed, *dabba* has turned into a sub-optimal mode of

production. For one thing, it is more expensive than cash labour. It thus wastes wealth that could otherwise be saved so as to eventually move up even higher on the development ladder. For Aftamo, the next step will be to improve his townhouse, in order to ask a higher rent. But such improvements cost money. So saving wealth by using cash labour allows Aftamo to make this step sooner than if he relied on *dabba*. Indeed, *dabba* can presently be outright detrimental to one's name. This is because in many people's eyes, to convene *dabba* is an index that you are more concerned with eating than with 'showing change': Why would you not use the cheaper alternative (cash labour), if it was not because you 'only thought about your stomach'?

Significantly, the shift from *dabba* to cash labour is more than just a shift from one mode of realizing name to another. It is also a shift from a mode of economic production which at the same time realizes *bonshmi*, to one that does not. I have described *dabba* as an occasion for socializing, for eating and drinking, dancing and joking, and thus for being in respectful interaction. And to invite each other reciprocally is part of cultivating respect, too. Cash labour, by contrast, does not produce *bonshmi*. Not only is there no commensality and no staying-together after the end of work. But cash labour does not produce any lasting relations, either, because it does not lead to mutual indebtedness. The cash fully recompenses the labour, and no obligation is on the patron to work in the future for those who worked for him today. The shift from *dabba* to cash labour, then, means a shift from a form of economic production which *co-realizes* the values of *bonshmi* and *nami*, to one that is only connected to the value of *nami* but does not afford *bonshmi*.

At present, people like Aftamo therefore face a trade-off which they would not have faced in the past: either they get their work done in a way productive of respectful interactions but with little benefit to their name, or they get their work done in a way that supports their project to build a name but that does not produce an occasion for respectful interaction. The decline of *dabba* shows that people have increasingly decided for the latter option. But this does not mean that this choice is unproblematic for them. On the contrary, *dabba* frequently featured among the things the disappearance of which people lamented.

Other changes in the realm of economic production were perceived to feature in the decline of respect, too – not only because they reduce occasions for respectful interaction but also because they sometimes lead to outright disrespect and conflict. The following case illustrates this.

The tensions between Kalibab and Kalinda erupted noisily one evening in May. It was the main planting season and the busiest time of the year. Kalibab had returned at nightfall, hungry, tired, and his legs caked in mud. More than an hour had passed since, and, too tired for conversation, he had sunken deep into his chair, sullenly listening to the radio's transmission of a melancholic flute's losing battle against atmospheric noise. And still no sign of Kalinda and the coffee. Kalinda finally appeared at half past eight, balancing a bowl with roasted grain and a coffee-pot, from which she hastily poured Kalibab a cup. But rather than to speak his usual blessing over the coffee, Kalibab declared that he could not drink any of it, because his 'stomach had become very hot'. What was the matter with Kalinda, he asked with barely suppressed rage. Had he not paid bridewealth for her? Had her father not told her to quickly serve her husband coffee, whenever he came home tired from work? And had her father not also told her to bring him water to wash his feet? Had she simply forgotten all of this, or did she take pleasure in seeing him hungry and dirty? This was not the first time she had been so slow, he said, pointing to several instances during the past weeks where he had had to wait an inordinate time for his coffee or food. Menacingly rapping his knuckles on the table, Kalibab warned her to, 'watch out, or you or one of the children is going to fall ill and say "yiiiii, yiiiii" [whine with pain].' With downcast eyes, Kalinda waited for some moments after Kalibab's eruption had ended. Then she turned to me, and – putting me in the position of a mediator – acknowledged that she had indeed failed in her domestic duties today and in the recent past, and that she was very sorry for that, 'for he is my husband, and so I should treat him with *bonshmi*.' But, she went on to explain with desperation, she was in a difficult situation and could not really do much about it. This year, she had rented a field from her sister's husband to grow garlic. She urgently needed the money to buy clothes. 'Because if you don't have good clothes, if you don't have three of this type and three of that, but always go in your same old clothes, people laugh at you. The other women at church would laugh at me.' Since Kalibab did not give her any money or clothes, she had to see to this herself. But she could only go to work in her field after she had finished the day's work assigned to her by Kalibab. This usually meant that she only got to do her own work in the late afternoon. Coming home after dark, she still had to tether her livestock for the night, and only then could she start preparing coffee and dinner. Thus she ended up failing to bring her husband his coffee in time.

It is only in the last few years that some women have started to rent fields and work ‘for themselves’ (*jinte mataken*). This innovation is driven by women’s increased need for cash, which in turn hangs together with the growing importance of consumer goods like clothes for being esteemed. As Kalinda’s case shows, this brings women into conflict with their husbands. Most husbands wish to control and exploit their wives’ labour power for their own purposes and expect to be treated deferentially at all times. This means that women like Kalinda now face a constant value conflict between cultivating their name and showing their husband the respect they know he deserves.

From Eating To Saving

In their quest for development, Dell people have remodelled the production side of their economic lives. Among others, they now work longer hours than in the past, grow more cash crops, sow two crops of grain per year instead of one, engage into new activities like trading livestock or operating a mill, and cut production costs through new forms of organizing labour. But the quest to gain a name through development also affects consumption practices. We have already seen that people now buy goods they did not buy in the past. Beyond that, many now consciously strive to ‘save’ (*sud*) wealth rather than to ‘eat’ (*its*) or otherwise ‘destroy’ (*kais*) it.

My friend Ankshi is a good example here. A teacher at the local school, Ankshi earned 1800 Birr per month. He also had two fields in which he grew food for his family as well as cash crops; on the weekends he went to trade sheep, and he was constantly on the lookout for new business ventures. So intense was his desire to grow, he told me one evening when I visited him for dinner, that he often lay awake at night, twisting his mind for ways to ‘grow’ even faster. At the same time, Ankshi was someone who enjoyed going to one of the bars in the village to have some bottles of soft-drink with his friends, and to tell one of the funny stories that he always seemed to have down pat. But an evening at the bar, Ankshi explained to me, easily cost him 60 or 70 Birr, and that was clearly too much. He had therefore decided to join an *iqub* (rotating savings association) where he would have to deposit 500 Birr per week. This meant that he simply would not be able to afford to go to the bar, because it would take him his entire salary and some more to pay 500 Birr a week, and if you failed to pay your contribution there was a high fine.

Ankshi, then, used *iqub* as a technique to keep himself from spending money on purposes that undermined his ‘growth’. It is important to note, however, that to go to the bar for Ankshi is not a desire he disapproves of. To drink and socialize with his friends is a value for him, no less than development. Yet, of these two values, the latter is apparently the more important one for him, and he is ready to sacrifice the *bonshmi* involved in socializing with others at the bar for the name he can gain through economic advancement.

During the time of my fieldwork, *iqub* were hugely popular in Dell. Apart from unmarried youngsters, almost everyone I knew (men and women alike) participated in one, and it was not uncommon that people challenged themselves by entering an *iqub* that required a slightly higher contribution than they felt they could easily afford. This was not only valued as a means to restrain one’s appetites so as to keep oneself from eating wealth. But to have hardly any cash at home was also considered a good thing because it meant that if others asked you to lend them money, you did not have to lie or to openly refuse their request.



Figure 11. An *iqub* at its fortnightly meeting in the compound of its convenor

Next to *iqub*, people in Dell also valued Evangelicalism as ‘good for saving’. This should not come as a surprise given my account in Chapter 2. There we have seen that evangelical institutions involve much less commensality than *karta* institutions; and we have learnt about the concern to quickly get done with things like funerals so as to not give people the chance to sin. I also showed that evangelical institutions continue to be reworked in order to make them less costly to prevent people from ‘becoming sad’. To be an Evangelical, then, means having relatively more time and wealth available for the pursuit of development. Next to Evangelicalism’s affordance of a world with less *gomma*, this relative inexpensiveness was widely perceived as another attractive feature. For a few people it was even the main reason for conversion (cf. Freeman 2012b). Just as in the case of *iqub*, however, the possibility to save wealth through being *amain* comes at the expense of commensality and *bonshmi*, as I have shown in the previous chapter.

A final way in which the quest for development and name has affected consumption in Dell relates to *karta*. As I have briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, if one examines how *karta* has changed over the past ten or fifteen years, one above all sees that it has become less costly. Funerals, for example, though having maintained their overall form, now involve much less expenditure or destruction of wealth. It used to be a required expression of respect for the dead to trample down their fields, to cut down the *arxemi* grove surrounding their compound, to break bee-hives, and to spill grain from the granaries. During the Derg it also became common to borrow guns from the *kebele* administration and to fire multiple rounds of shots. None of this is done any longer in Dell. One reason for this is that funerary destruction was prohibited after being identified as a ‘harmful traditional practice’ in a manual released by South Aari district in 2006. Significantly, however, several people suggested that this prohibition had been quite welcome. With the government’s sanction, they no longer had to fulfil obligations which they had already come to perceive as wasteful.

If some institutions have been down-scaled and become less expensive, other institutions have disappeared more or less completely because people are no longer ready to invest wealth in them. *Siri* feasting groups are a prime example. A *siri* consisted of 12 to 16 people, usually men, sometimes also women. They would meet every six to eight weeks. Each time, a different member acted as host. He (or she) had to provide two fat sheep, as well as beer and bread. People stayed together for five or six days, eating, talking, resting. It was a rule that you were not allowed to do any work during this time; in case of failure to

comply with this, you had to pay a small sheep or alcohol as a fine (which was jointly consumed). *Siri* was highly valued because it created kinship-like relations among participants and afforded multiple expressions of *bonshmi*. It also was good for one's name to eat in a *siri* because it both showed one's wealth and one's readiness to host others. The memory of *siri* invariably brought a glitter into people's eyes. Yet, while there were perhaps 20 or 25 such groups during the 1990s, there was only one left when I did my fieldwork. *Siri*, people explained, simply was too costly and time-intensive and, like *dabba*, something that indexed an excessive concern with one's 'stomach'. *Siri*, in brief, now is bad for your name. Under the pull of development, feasting groups have been sacrificed for building reputation.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter took off from the observation that over the past 15 or so years, people in Dell have embarked on an avid quest for development. The concern with 'growing' economically, both personally and as a community, is now a top concern, and this has entailed significant changes in how people use their time and wealth. The chapter sought to offer an explanation for this profound engagement with development and to examine how it has affected respect. I argued that power-based explanations do not really fit the case of Dell because people embrace development as something positive rather than try to resist it. The amount of energy ploughed into the pursuit of development cannot simply be explained as an effect of coercion. I then went on to ask what motivates people to pursue development. Here it became clear that progress at development is deemed essential for 'having a name', and that this is a key aspiration for people, not least because it forms part of what it means to be respected. But the discovery that people pursue development to build their name threw up a further question: given that people previously evaluated name on the basis of wealth in people and sponsorship of feasts, how did they come to take development and wealth in modern goods as the standard for assessing name? I argued that people have engaged with development in a quest to realize the value of name more fully than had been possible in the past, when they felt that they did not have a name vis-à-vis the Gamma. Moreover, I observed that the understanding that consumption of modern goods turns people into Gamma comes with possibilities for gaining a greater reputation inside of Dell. Having offered an explanation for how people came to take up the pursuit of development, I went

on to point out the troubling consequence of this: the emergence of a value conflict between reputation and respect – between working to be highly regarded and working to be in respectful interaction with others. I showed that people increasingly opted in favour of name, but that they were also keenly aware of how this undermined respect. Indeed, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter, the quest for development, beyond drawing away resources from kinship and commensality, also comes with a rise in aggressive competition, envy, greed and other social ills. As such, development does not just contribute to the decline of traditional forms of respect but also poses a threat to specifically evangelical conceptions of this value. It is to this threat and Evangelicals' defence against it that I now turn.

Chapter 4. Defending Respect: An Evangelical Critique of Economic Development

4.1 Introduction

For some moments the sound of the softly falling rain was all there was to be heard. Then, taking a deep breath, Adamo launched into the final bit of his prayer. ‘Lord forgive us!’ he supplicated, ‘these are times in which things of the flesh are all we think about. Oh God, forgive us! We steal your time and don't go out to work for you. Forgive us for having abandoned your work! We are people filled with sin. Throwing you down to the ground we pass our days. And we are afraid when we look ahead. When your fight comes upon us, God, what are we to do?’

When the last words of the prayer had died away, silence settled over the dimly lit hut, interrupted but for the occasional remorseful sigh. On this day in May 2017, some 25 women and men had assembled to celebrate the Friday morning service in their budin (group). One of five small groups of Dell's largest evangelical church, this *budin* brought together believers from Makibot area. For some years it had had its own meeting place in a spacious hut, built on a small piece of land owned by the group.

Stepping into the centre of the circle formed by the attendants, Adamo, a gentle, soft-spoken man in his mid-30s, looked around for a moment and then laid down his unopened bible on the pulpit. One of the small group's five main leaders, Adamo had been commissioned with leading the service that day. ‘I will not use the bible today,’ he said in a calm voice, ‘but will speak to you plainly.’ Looking around the group he continued:

‘Last night, as we leaders had our meeting in here, a chunk of the wall came off. That made me think if it wouldn't be better to close down this place altogether. What's the point of going on like this? How many times have we said we'll build a new hut, or even a tin-roofed house. But so far we've only managed to clear away the grass [from the new building site]. And I'm sure it'll have grown back by the time we get out to work again... These are days when land is scarce. So wouldn't it be better to give this land to someone who will use it for growing grain? We started this place in the hope of making more people from Makibot area believe, and to grow into a full church one day. Today, many people in this area are believers. But when we call for God's Work, hardly anyone turns up. The other day, I thought about blowing the *turumba* (horn used by local government

officials to call people for communal work) and shouting, 'Makibot Small Grouuuup, Tomorrow Six O'clock, Everyone Come To Woork!' But this is the way of the government, not that of the church. We don't force anyone to come; we should be desirous to do God's Work. So whose problem is this? Probably of us leaders. If we went out and worked, then surely others would follow our example. But we don't even come to sleep over [on Thursday night before the Friday service]. We sleep at home. We throw God down and just sleep.'

At this point, one of the other leaders, who had been absent from the previous night's meeting, blurted out 'You don't know my problem. My wife is ill and I had to go to the market [to sell something] to be able to buy medicine.' Unperturbed, Adamo went on with his harangue for some time, before he closed by saying: 'All we think about these days is our own *gabinti* ('growth', development). But if you go to the market, and you know there'll be a church event later that day, you may have to sell for five Birr, what you had hoped to sell for ten. What kind of days have come upon us that all we think about are things of the flesh? May God forgive us!'

The scene witnessed in the small group that rainy Friday morning was by no means unusual. On the contrary, the notion that people were overly concerned with development or 'things of the flesh' (*wa rej*) was frequently voiced by *amain* ('believers') in Dell. There were several occasions, for example, when a preacher urged congregants to not care so much about their clothes, and to 'come to church without even having washed your face.' In prayers people bemoaned that they no longer took time to think about God because all they did was to 'run around' in pursuit of wealth. Repeatedly I heard God being asked to help people overcome their 'addiction to money' (*Birrite sus*). And materialism and greed were also common topics in private conversations among dedicated Evangelicals. On such occasions, people cited bible passages that urge not to worry about the material side of one's life, but to focus on seeking God. Particularly popular were Matthew 6: 19-21 – on not storing up treasures on earth but in heaven – and Matthew 6: 26-34 – on trusting that God will feed and clothe you, just as he does with the 'birds of the air' that 'do not sow or reap or store away in barns', and the 'flowers of the field' that 'do not labour or spin'.

Evangelical Christianity and Economic Development

Dell Kale Heywot's critical stance toward the quest for economic development is rather unusual when compared to other ethnographic accounts of Christianity and economic life in Africa.

For some time now, there has been a lively debate concerning the extent to which different forms of Christianity – particularly from within the evangelical spectrum – contribute to economic progress in Africa. Several scholars have presented cases where churches contributed to development by preaching frugality, hard work, rational planning, entrepreneurialism and individual accumulation (Maxwell 1998, Berger 2008, 2010, van Dijk 2009, Freeman 2012a, 2012b). In other cases, scholars have doubted such a positive influence. Writing about Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal churches preaching the Prosperity Gospel, for instance, Gifford (2015) argues that reliance on massive offerings and faith rather than on hard work may mean that in reality no contribution to economic progress is made. Yet others have pointed out that in impoverished urban and rural areas, where worldly prosperity is not within reach, churches often focus less on prosperity than on security, healing and deliverance (Maxwell 2006: 420, Englund 2011, Hasu 2012, Jones 2009). How much Christianity *de facto* contributes to the economic advancement of its followers, then, is subject to ongoing debate and certainly differs between cases. What does not differ across the cited ethnographic contexts, is local Christians' sense that prosperity – elusive as it may be – is desirable and worth striving for, even if only as part of a broader project of social production (Haynes 2013). By contrast, we have hardly any ethnographic accounts of African Christians who problematize wealth and the pursuit of economic development. It is at this point, then, that my case differs.

Against this background, my aim in the first part of this chapter is to understand why exactly the church in Dell is critical of development. Here we will see how the present chapter fits into the broader concerns of this thesis: I show that the church is critical because the feverish pursuit of development – and the antagonisms that are its result – pose challenges to the church's vision of a society marked by humility and mutual respect. In other words, the evangelical critique of development appears as an attempt to push back against the decline of respect. The second part of the chapter asks what it takes for the evangelical defence of respect to be successful. I approach this question through people's own understandings of what makes Evangelicals 'spiritually strong', meaning ready to give

up on development where it conflicts with Christian principles. On my interlocutors' account, experiencing God's power and playing an active role in church are two key factors for spiritual strength. I explain why this also makes sense from an analytical viewpoint, and I provide evidence that these factors do indeed have an effect on people's economic practice. I conclude by pointing to a further factor that allows some people to be strong Christians: The most dedicated Evangelicals in Dell can realize through Evangelicalism what others can only realize through development: a great name. For these Evangelicals there is no conflict between being respectful of others and building a name, for it is through the former that they achieve the latter.

4.2 Evangelical Criticisms of Development

Let us go back to the scene from the introduction to start examining why the local church is critical of development. The immediate trigger for Adamo's harangue was a chunk of the wall coming off during the leaders' meeting. As he reminded his listeners, they had repeatedly made plans to build a new hut or even a tin-roofed house. But due to low working morale, none of this had materialized. The crumbling wall, therefore, appeared as a tangible sign of people's failure to do God's Work.

God's Work (*sabite woni*) is something Evangelicalism in Dell puts high value on. Everyone is expected to participate in the collective work carried out by the church and the small groups on one morning per week respectively. This work can consist in freely helping elderly or sick people, or, as in the present case, in repairing and expanding church buildings. More commonly, it takes the form of cultivating church-owned land or doing agricultural labour for paying clients. Next to people's tithes, these are the only sources of income for the church, which does not receive any funding from outside of Dell. God's Work, then, is economically necessary. But it is also seen as an important expression of faith (*imnet*). Indeed, it is said that 'faith and work are one' and that 'there's no faith without work'. This is because to work for God is to honour Him as the true creator and owner of all things. People's labour power and time ultimately are gifts from God; and thankfulness for this gift ought to move them – ought to make them desirous (*uxim*), as Adamo put it to the small group – to return a part of what they have received.



Figure 12. A small group harvesting wheat

For all its importance, however, God's Work often was not very well attended. In Adamo's group, for instance, there were several occasions when work had been scheduled but then failed to get very far because only a handful of people turned up. This problem also affected the church. Tellingly, the overseer of the church's fields pointed out to me that, in reaction to unreliable attendance of God's Work, they had started to look for less labour intensive ways of generating income. A first step had been to plant eucalypti in one of the church's fields, instead of using it for crops. As the overseer explained, 'the trees grow on their own, they don't require much labour. They grow for seven or eight or nine years and then we cut them down and sell them to people from town [for house construction].'

A related complaint by the church was that people failed to tithe correctly. In Dell, *amain* are expected to give 10% of their harvest as well as a tenth of all money made through the sale of livestock or received as bridewealth. They are also to give the first offspring of a cow or sheep. Contrary to the case of God's Work, where lack of participation

was directly visible, it was more difficult to assess the extent to which people did not tithe properly. But it is sufficient to note that in the local understanding this was a real problem – so real, indeed, that when Dell was hit by drought in 2016, people’s failure to tithe correctly was singled out as the key reason for why God had decided to discipline them by way of a drought.

The widespread failure to attend God’s Work and to tithe properly was explained as a result of people’s urgent desire to get ahead economically. During the drought, for instance, one preacher imitated what people thought when their cow’s first calf was female: You think about all the offspring this calf is eventually going to bear for, picturing how your cattle herd will grow; you think ahead to the economic growth this calf is going to afford you, but this desire for cattle eclipses the desire you should feel to honour God by giving this first calf to Him.

Or take the explanations members of the small group gave in response to Adamo’s harangue. One woman avowed that she had been absent from God’s Work the other day because her onion field required urgent weeding if the onions were not to be choked. Another group member explained that he had failed to come because, hearing that the price for garlic had gone up, he had rushed to the market to sell some. Hence, a first reason for the church’s critique of the desire for development was the observation that the latter sometimes makes people disrespect God, by keeping for themselves what they really ought to give to Him.

Further fuel for the problematization of development was provided by cases where Evangelicals sought to gain economic advantage through aggressive means. These included borrowing money and then denying to have done so, or trying to increase the size of their field by ‘eating’ from that of their neighbour (i.e. ploughing beyond the border). In one extreme case, an *amain* man hired someone from outside of Dell to kill his brother’s son, Bashi. A few weeks earlier, Bashi had successfully sued him for a field, which had belonged to Bashi’s father. It had been wrongfully appropriated by Bashi’s father’s brother, when Bashi’s father died. Now the brother hoped to get the field back by murdering its legitimate owner. This case sparked a great deal of discussion, and for many epitomized how far things had degenerated because of the current desire for wealth.

On a related note it was critically observed that people who had suffered economic damage because of someone else’s fault seemed less and less ready to forgive freely. In

Chapter 2 we have already heard about the importance of forgiveness in the context of *gomma*. Forgiveness is also central to the economic ethics advocated by the church. It is so important, indeed, that we should look at it in some more detail.

To begin with, consider the following account which describes how forgiveness *ought* to be practised in economic life. It was given by Abraham, whom we know from Chapter 2 as a particularly virtuous Evangelical.

When I came to my field, four stray cattle were grazing on the crop. They had entered the field on previous occasions, but this time they had all but finished my maize. I asked around for the owner, but couldn't find out who it was. So, finally, I drove the cattle to the *kebele* [administration] to have them confined. The next morning, the owner, a man called Muli, alongside some elders came to my house. 'Gasho', I said to him [using a respectful form of address], 'look at my crops. I wanted to raise my children from this maize, but now it's all gone.' 'I will pay! I will pay!' he cried, 'I will plant a similar-sized field and give you the harvest. Or what else are you going to eat?' But I declined, and I also gave him the 60 Birr it had cost him to ransom his oxen from the *kebele*. 'God's Holy Word tells us to not make others pay', I explained to him. 'In Matthew 5:13 it says that we are the salt of the earth. If I asked compensation, I would be like savour-less salt, to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. We are to be like a shining town on a hilltop, visible from afar.' When I had said all this to him, Muli responded, 'May God bless you!'. ... Well, you see, *that's* what I want! When is said, 'God bless you', you can sleep without having eaten. God doesn't make me go hungry. He says, 'Do not worry!' He feeds the birds that neither sow nor build a granary. So will He not feed us, too?

Situations like the one faced by Abraham are far from unusual in contemporary Dell. As a result of population growth and land scarcity, people now use every available inch of land. It therefore happens much more easily than in the past (when there were wide stretches of unused land) that livestock stray onto a neighbouring field or meadow, or that a fire set to burn down shrubbery destroys crops in an adjacent field. Yet, as Abraham explains based on his own example, no matter how great the damage you have suffered, you need to forgive others freely. Indeed, in his own case, the very act of having Muli's cattle confined at the *kebele* was a departure from doctrine, which prohibits any form of 'making others pay'. It was for this reason that Abraham (who had seen no other way to identify the cattle's owner than having them confined) gave 60 Birr to Muli.

The emphasis on unconditional forgiveness is a striking feature of Dell Evangelicalism. It contrasts with cases where a more aggressive way of dealing with economic conflicts is promoted. Van Dijk, for instance, writing about Botswanian Pentecostal churches catering to migrants from Ghana, reports how a woman running a hair salon boasted about firing an employee, whom she suspected of not handing in all the money received from her customers (2009: 108). This kind of self-assertive behaviour was praised and demanded by pastors; and less self-assertive women were ostracised from the church (ibid.: 109). Along similar lines, others have reported about practices of ‘spiritual warfare’ (Van de Kamp 2011, Van Wyk 2014) or ‘dangerous prayers’ (Haynes 2017: 5), that believers are encouraged to use against those who stand in their way toward economic prosperity. In these cases, firing an unreliable employee or trying to assert oneself by enlisting God’s power against others, are not only considered legitimate but are deemed exhibitions of spiritual strength. In Dell, by contrast, the opposite is true. Here, one demonstrates faith through lenience and forgiveness, even if this comes at a considerable economic cost.

Yet, not everyone in Dell was ready to accept this cost. My conversation with Abraham took place against the background of a couple of recent cases where Evangelicals had demanded compensation. One man had suffered the death of his horse after it had been kicked by another man’s horse. Arguing that without a horse he could not transport his produce to the market, he demanded the other man’s horse in compensation (which is the *karta* way of dealing with such a situation). In another case, a man lost an oxen because it was gored to death by his neighbour’s bull. He demanded that his neighbour give him an oxen because otherwise he would be unable to plough his field. In a third case, a man went before the local government court to sue someone who had purportedly borrowed money from him but who denied having done so. He argued that he urgently needed the money to pay his contributions to an *iqub* saving association. However, this too was a violation of doctrine, which prohibits taking others to court (see Sommerschuh forthcoming a). In all these cases, then, people violated the principle of forgiveness because they feared that they would lose out economically. The occurrence of such cases was another reason for the problematization of the quest for development.

A final reason concerns the *telos* of development. In Chapter 3 we saw that people’s main motivation to pursue development is to increase their name – to gain other people’s

admiration and to be considered ‘great’ or ‘heavy’. But this aspiration contradicts Dell Evangelicalism’s emphasis on humility. As we saw in Chapter 2, the church in Dell urges people to value others above themselves. To strive to magnify one’s name, however, is to strive to be on top of others. Moreover, to realize the value of name, wealth needs to be displayed in the form of prestige goods. From the local evangelical point of view, however, display amounts to boastfulness and is a sign of pride. It is also condemned as a cause of sadness. Thus, in a service shortly before Christmas 2016, a preacher urged congregants not to wear new clothes for the upcoming Christmas service, arguing that those who could not afford buying any, would become sad if they saw others in beautiful new outfits.

To sum up, evangelical discourse in Dell features a critique of the quest for development. This quest is blamed for a number of ills. These include failure to tithe and do God’s Work, use of aggressive means to gain economic advantage, failure to forgive freely, improper concern with personal greatness and boastfulness. Beyond this, the desire for development is blamed for a rise in envy and greed, for increasingly strained relations among neighbours and kin, and for people being less ready to help each other freely. All in all, evangelical discourse identifies development as that which has made ‘love cool down’ (*solmanem zaste*) and ‘destroyed respect’ (*bonshminem kaiste*). This Christian critique of development, I suggest, is one key factor in contemporary Dell which pushes back against the decline of respect. How and with what success, I shall examine in a moment. Before that, however, two qualifications need to be made.

Firstly, it is important to remember that Dell Evangelicalism has its own understanding of what constitutes proper respect, and that this understanding differs from traditional understandings (Chapter 2). Evangelicalism favours a mutual, not a directional, version of respect; this means that everyone owes respect to everyone else, independent of their social standing. The church also accords much less room and value to commensality. Traditionally key to cultivating respect, commensality has been much reduced in evangelical institutions to avoid sin. Therefore, if this chapter suggests that Evangelicalism in Dell currently pushes back against the decline of respect, this refers to the decline of respect as far as evangelical understandings of proper respect are concerned.

Secondly, while Evangelicalism may be critical of development, one has to note that this critique is not absolute. The church in Dell does not advocate poverty as an ideal; it does not tell people to give up on development altogether. As a matter of fact, the new use

of wealth associated with development is supported by the church inasmuch as modern goods do not carry the dangers of debauchery associated with feasting. Moreover, when the state first introduced the concept of development to Dell in the early 2000s, the church endorsed it as something that was opposed to what the church also opposed, namely traditional practice (*karta*). If the church is more critical today, this is because the increasingly feverish quest for development brings to the fore the above described tensions. The more people rationalize their lives toward the end of development, the more development comes into conflict with what is asked of them as Christians. It is not development per se, then, that the church critiques, but people's growing tendency to put development above Christian values.

So what are the consequences of this critique? How and under what conditions does it come to affect people's practice? Why do some people put their economic interests first, whereas others, like Abraham, act according to Christian values? Phrased in more abstract terms: in cases where people participate in two cultural formations that make contradictory demands on them, what leads them to privilege the demands of one over those of the other? It is important to answer this question in order to understand under which conditions Dell Evangelicalism succeeds at defending respect against the onslaught of the market.

I would like to approach this question by picking up on a distinction Dell Evangelicals draw between 'weak' (*lanxmi*) and 'strong' (*zami*) believers. Essentially, being 'strong' means striving to put Christian values first, whereas being 'weak' means being less committed and more prone to depart from Christian principles.²⁷ In people's own understanding, there are two main factors that can make someone 'strong': experiencing God's wrath and serving in church. Looking at these factors in turn, I show that people's understanding also makes sense in analytical terms. This is because the factors they point to involve kinds of experiences and activities that have long been theorized as leading to heightened value commitment.

4.3 Sources of Religious Commitment (1): Experiencing God's Wrath

It was a bolt from the blue. Doing some work around his house, Girta suddenly passed out and remained unconscious for more than an hour. When he awoke, he felt extremely weak and asked his kin to take him to a clinic in the provincial capital. Numerous examinations

²⁷ While this distinction may be more frequently employed by those who consider themselves as 'strong', I also spoke to people who readily described themselves as 'weak'.

and 3000 Birr later, the doctors still had not found anything. Thus, Girta returned to Dell and called some church leaders to ‘take *nisa*’, i.e. to confess before them. Alongside the leaders, Girta called the representatives of his cell's²⁸ women's group, for it was with this group, he suspected, that his troubles originated.

Some months ago, the women's group and Girta had agreed to work together by way of *kotsa* (share-cropping). Girta had provided a field and the women had provided onion seeds and labour, and recently they had together harvested 14 large sacks of onions, half of which belonged to the women. Girta had offered to buy their half (hoping to re-sell it at a profit), and he had promised to pay 400 Birr per sack, i.e. 2800 Birr in total. It was agreed that some days later he would meet the women in Gob (two hours' walk away from Dell) and give them the money. The women would then go on to buy a set of matching clothes for themselves. The new outfit was to be worn on the next day's political holiday *Gimbot 20* (‘Downfall of the Derg’), when each of the 16 women's groups from Dell would demonstrate their commitment to and success at development by parading around the main village in new clothes.

But meeting them in town on the appointed day, Girta said he would only give them 350 Birr per sack, since the price for onions had dropped. Angry about Girta breaking his word, the women declined and went back to Dell empty-handed – although this meant having to endure the humiliation of attending the political holiday in their old clothes. After the holiday, during the weekly cell meeting, the women brought up the case, insisting that Girta pay the promised 2800 Birr. They also demanded that he reimburse them for the expenses they purported to have had for food and drink on their unsuccessful trip to town. The cell leaders ruled that Girta should pay 1300 Birr as a reimbursement; and this he did perforce. But he continued to refuse paying 2800 Birr for the onions, and instead proposed that the women take their seven sacks (still stored at his house) and sell them on their own. But when the women went to fetch the sacks, they discovered that Girta had emptied some of their onions into his own sacks. He had done so because as the onions dry, they lose in volume. But in the market one only gets the highest price for sacks filled to the point of bursting. At this point the women said something like, ‘fine, we'll take the difference from God’. And, indeed, a week later, God presented the bill to Girta – striking him unconscious.

28 Remember that the cell is a state institution assembling households from the same neighbourhood.

This whole story emerged from the slightly rambling account that Girta gave to the church leaders as well as from the explanations provided by the representatives of the women's group. The church leaders listened carefully. After Girta had finished his confession, they told him that if a Christian promises to pay 400 Birr per sack, that is what he has to pay, no matter if the market price drops in the meantime. And to take away some of the women's onions, of course, was nothing other than theft. Here then lay his transgression and the reason for his illness. To the representatives of the women's group, in turn, the leaders said that it had been wrong to demand reimbursement of their expenses for food and drink (which had moreover been greatly exaggerated). This was nothing other than asking compensation, and hence was a sin, too. The church leaders therefore proposed that Girta should pay an additional 1500 Birr on top of the 1300 he had paid already. This would complete the 2800 he had promised to pay, and it would change the status of the 1300 Birr from compensation to partial payment. Girta agreed and both he and the women asked each other and God for forgiveness.

Here we have a case where illness is interpreted as divine punishment for economic misconduct. Girta tried to best his business partners, but soon after he fell ill, and this was taken as the direct outcome of his sinful acts. Cases like Girta's, I suggest, play an important educative role in Dell, since they convey a simple message: You cannot gain at God's expense! After the drop of the price for onions, Girta tried to rescue his profit margin by reneging on his promise to pay 400 Birr per sack. Later, he tried to make up for the loss he had suffered through the compensation payment by stealing some of the women's onions. But not only did God foil this plot. He also inflicted a heavy loss on Girta, who wasted 3000 Birr at the hospital to be healed of an affliction that only God could alleviate. This was a loss much greater than the few extra Birr Girta could have made, had his plan worked out.²⁹

Note that a similar logic was at play when the aforementioned drought was interpreted as God's response to people's failure to tithe correctly. The underlying message here is that if people choose to keep the entirety of their harvest to themselves, God will not give them *any* harvest next time. Again, one loses much more than one could gain by keeping the 10% for oneself. The same kind of reasoning, finally, was apparent in the conversation I had with Abraham about his response to Muli's cattle devastating his field.

²⁹ As people were keen to note, this also happened to the man who had tried to kill his brother's son. While he was arranging the murder, someone had audio-recorded the conversation between him and the killer and had informed the police. The man then spent an alleged 30.000 Birr in bribes to avoid being arrested.

For one thing, Abraham suggested that he forgave freely because he trusted that God would not make him go hungry. But a little later in our conversation, he also asserted that to take compensation would have had devastating effects. Passionately Abraham explained that:

‘It was Satan who untied the cattle and drove them into my field. It was Satan who sued for my grain. So if I took grain in compensation, that grain would be useless (*meyayinda*). It would be food that doesn't satiate (*mishayinda*). And if I sold it in the market, chances are a thief would take the money... So if I take compensation, hunger will come to my house. But if I forgive, there will be no hunger.’

In short, Abraham here works with the assumption that economically the most rational way to handle damage is to *not* seek compensation. From the doctrinal point of view – which he here represents – there ‘really’ is no trade-off between economic well-being and being a good Christian. Or, to employ Weber’s categories (1978: 24f.), what is value rational – to tithe, to forgive, to not cheat others – is also instrumentally rational – in ensuring a good harvest, economic recovery, or successful business. Put yet differently, evangelical ideology here seeks to encompass development by suggesting that one can only attain the latter if one excels at being a good Christian.

Cases like Girta’s offer Dell Evangelicals a palpable representation of this message. They are often talked about in the wider community, and in this way certainly have some educative effect on everyone. It is plausible to think, however, that divine punishment above all matters for the one who personally experiences it, and that this experience entails heightened commitment to following Christian doctrine. This is plausible because it has long been theorized that a key way in which cultural ideas become subjectively compelling is when they are communicated in moments of intense experience. Following Durkheim (1974), scholars have mostly made this argument with regard to ‘effervescent’, i.e. strong, positive, enthusiastic kinds of experiences (Turner 1967, Joas 2000, Robbins 2015b: 220ff.). However, as value theorist Hans Joas argues, negative or ‘traumatic’ experiences can also give rise to value commitment:

‘[I]t is not just galvanizing experiences that give rise to value commitments. Experiences of powerlessness also shape us profoundly. When we come up against our limits and experience how little we can steer our fate or that of others, or when we become radically aware of the finitude of our existence through experiences of illness, disability or the inevitability of death, this too transforms our relationship to ourselves, the world, and our values.’ (Joas 2013: 69)

To suddenly drop unconscious while otherwise in a state of good health, as happened to Girta, surely qualifies as such an experience of powerlessness. In being interpretatively linked to the notion of God's omnipotence, this experience is likely to instil a profound sense that it is important to obey God.

This was a view that *amain* themselves asserted. There was a common notion that one of the reasons why there was more spiritual 'weakness' today – why people were more ready to privilege developmental over Christian values – was that there were many who had converted 'without having seen a problem' (*kalemi shedkideyk*). In the early days of Evangelicalism, as was explained to me, people only converted after long and terrible illness. This was due not least to widespread opposition to Evangelicalism and social pressure to first try out traditional means. Today, by contrast, people converted 'for nothing more than a common cold'. This was a good thing in principle, people asserted, but it was also true that the earlier converts appeared to be much stronger in their faith than today's converts who had not personally experienced God's power to harm and heal.

Conversely, there were cases where experiences of God's wrath ushered in heightened commitment to evangelical values. Milkias, for instance, at one point had suffered considerable economic damage because a fire set by a neighbour to burn down shrubbery had jumped into his field and devoured his wheat. Breaking with doctrine he claimed compensation. Soon after he was affected by further mishap including the death of two young children and a fire that destroyed his hut. His situation only improved after he returned to the church, from which he had become alienated in the meantime, acknowledging that it had been wrong to take compensation for the burnt wheat. In the following years he became a very dedicated believer and now leads a small group. He has also recovered economically and is now rather well-to-do; and in his understanding this is because he is now very meticulous in his observance of Christian principles. In Milkias case, then, the experience of God's wrath has led to a heightened commitment to leading a righteous life.

4.4 Sources of Religious Commitment (2): Serving in Church

The threat, and especially the personal experience of God's wrath, is one important factor that can move people to privilege Christian over developmental values – that is, to only pursue development to the extent that this does not undermine their righteousness. But

Evangelicals in Dell also suggested that in order to be truly ‘strong’ in your faith, it was essential to serve in church. Conversely, to not serve was seen as conducive to spiritual weakness. As Tamrat, a man in his mid-20s admitted, ‘I’m not particularly strong [in my faith]. That’s because I don’t serve. Once, I was asked to preach. But I was shy and it didn’t go well. Since then I haven’t again become involved. But it is when you sing in a choir, for instance, that you become strong.’ So how does serving lead to spiritual strength? And how does spiritual strength influence economic practice? Before I turn to these questions, let me briefly explain what is meant by ‘serving’.

The church in Dell is a highly participatory one. Without any salaried staff, all work is carried out by unpaid volunteers recruited from among the members. To work for the church is referred to as ‘giving service’ (*agelgilot iminti*). There are a great number of positions in which people can serve. To begin with, there exist numerous leadership positions, including five for men, five for women and five for youths, and in each of the five small groups one again finds such a 15-strong leaders’ committee. On top of that, there are leadership positions relating to overseeing fields and manual labour, and there is a group of 12 elders, who also have the status of leaders. Next, the church has six choirs consisting of 17 members each, and each small group has a further, slightly smaller choir of its own. Singing in a choir is considered as ‘giving service’, too. There also exist offices relating to tasks like preparing the church for a service, passing around the alms bag, washing the feet of visitors, or cooking for leaders’ overnight meetings; and all of these duplicate again at the small group level. Finally, tasks like leading the service, leading a prayer or preaching are given to different people each week, with a publicly displayed bi-annual plan announcing people’s names in advance. With some people serving in more than one position, there are about 140 people who serve in the church or at small group level. This is almost one third of the total church membership.

I will now make three points about how serving leads to ‘spiritual strength’ or heightened commitment to Christian values. A fourth and final point is offered after having considered examples of how ‘spiritual strength’ can influence economic practice.

(1) My first point concerns a frequently voiced notion that for their service to be ritually efficient, servants need to be free from sin when they carry it out. Otherwise their service will fail to achieve its intended result. For example, the prayer of someone in a state of sin would not help a sick person because it is ‘like the sound of a cow’s bell; it does not

go up to heaven'. Likewise, if someone tried to preach after having sinned, the words would not come out correctly, or they would fail to attract the listeners' attention. If there is unconfessed sin among the members of a choir, God will not take notice of the songs they sing in his praise. And if there is a sinner among the women who cook for the church leader's weekly meeting, the food will be unsavoury.

The notion that ritual efficacy presupposes spiritual purity means that servants frequently have to reflect on whether they have sinned. This thoughtfulness is institutionally supported in two ways. First, all those who serve in church on a given day gather for confession before they take up their work. Commonly, such a gathering begins with one person addressing God on everyone's behalf, naming the various sins people tend to be guilty of, and asking God's forgiveness. After this, everyone who is – or, through listening to this list of potential sins, has become – conscious of having sinned, will confess individually in front of the group. Second, servants assume that God is much quicker to retaliate upon them than upon people who do not serve in church. God works in this way because he wants them to become conscious of their sins quickly so that the efficacy of their service may not be undermined (and so that they may not lead others into error by being bad exemplars, see below). Based on this assumption, servants are quick to interpret any small mishap as a sign from God. For example, one Sunday after the service, the choir assembled for confession. I learnt that they felt their performance had not gone well; the guitar had sounded off-tune and the singers had repeatedly been out of sync. Eventually, one female member of the choir confessed to having been angry with her husband that morning because he had required her to look after the cattle, which she felt was his job not hers. She did not confess this when the choir met for confession before the service. It may well be that she only really became aware of her anger when, in response to the failed performance, choir members were invited to reflect deeply about what sins they had overlooked during their earlier confession.

It is not only within church contexts but also in private life that minor problems are understood as signs from God. Thus, one time a small group leader told me about having had a cold over the past days. Reflecting about what he might have done to attract the cold, he eventually remembered that some days earlier he had become sad about other people from his group who had failed to show up for work they had previously agreed to carry out together. He said that once he had confessed this to them, his cold disappeared.

In being regularly led to reflect on and evaluate in Christian terms their conduct, thoughts and emotions, I argue, servants develop a heightened awareness both for the subtleties of what counts as sin and for their personal sinful tendencies. This kind of awareness, however, is a precondition for anticipating and avoiding spiritual pitfalls, and thus for leading lives that conform as closely as possible to religious principles. Below, I will provide evidence that this heightened awareness has a restrictive effect on economic action. Before that, however, two further ways in which serving in church fosters commitment to evangelical principles need to be discussed.



Figure 13. A choir leader preaches at an outdoor service

(2) All servants in Dell, but especially those in a leadership position, are expected to be good examples (*kamsi*) for others. The importance of leaders acting as exemplars is founded on a long-standing local understanding that people imitate their leaders. This understanding has been buttressed by Evangelicalism. As Esias explained based on Luke 17:2,

‘Others look at us [leaders]. If we don’t do something, they will ask, “why should we do it?” This means that it was through us that they were led into sin. But the bible says that the one who causes another person to stumble should have a stone hung around their neck and be thrown into the sea.’

It is a common understanding, indeed, that God will punish leaders with particular severity if they lead others into sin through poor example. Hence, on a first level, the requirement to act in an exemplary fashion is backed up by the threat of divine punishment. However, I would like to argue that exemplary conduct also generates a more ‘intrinsic’ kind of motivation to follow God's law.

To see this, one first has to understand what is locally meant by ‘exemplarity’. For me, this became clearest through a comment Abraham made about the conflict resolution between Johannis and Solomon, discussed in Chapter 2. Remember that Johannis was found to have wronged his father-in-law, Solomon, and that he therefore had to ask Solomon for forgiveness. To do so, Johannis stood up and said, ‘If you say I have done wrong, then may God forgive me.’ Later, Abraham pointed out to me that ‘if you say’ is a phrasing often employed by weak believers, which shows that they have not truly repented. Correctly, one uses no conditional clause, but asserts outright, ‘I have done wrong, so may God forgive me.’ A lack of repentance, Abraham noted, is also indicated when people furrow their brow while asking for forgiveness. Similarly, a weak believer who has been offended often frowns while saying to the offender ‘may God forgive you’. This reveals that they do not truly desire to forgive. Such linguistic or physiognomic details, Abraham explained, were signs that a person's ‘stomach hadn't cleared’ (*norti uski*; the stomach, as we know, is the seat of the feelings). The other way round, there also existed signs indicating that someone acted ‘truly from the stomach’ (*dofen norti girank*); with a big smile, for instance, indicating a real desire to forgive, or a soft, whisper-like mode of speaking indexing true repentance.

Clearly, Abraham works with a distinction between acting out of inner conviction and acting without such conviction. He also suggests that there are external signs of a person's inner attitude. Now, one conspicuous characteristic of church servants, and in particular of leaders is what often appeared to me as a somewhat exaggerated or theatrical

way of acting. For example, during funerals these people would exhibit the utmost happiness and not allow themselves any expression of sadness; to show their humility they would often speak in voices so low that they were barely audible (cf. Sommerschuh forthcoming b); physical labour for the church was carried out with signs of great enthusiasm, and offerings made with radiant joy.

Against this background, I suggest that being an exemplar in Dell is – beyond scrupulous adherence to divine law – about manifesting in one's acts the external signs of inner conviction. It is about showing that one carries out a given act not because one is forced to, but because one truly cares and desires to do so. In this way, exemplary servants in Dell do not only represent to other believers the objective values of the evangelical culture they jointly inhabit (Robbins 2015a, see also Humphrey 1997), They also show how one should subjectively relate to these, namely desirously or in an 'intrinsically motivated' way. More importantly, yet, it may be argued that the performance of exemplarity does not only index certain inner qualities but also produces these in the first place and reproduces them over time. For servants in Dell, one could say, exemplary conduct achieves the same thing that wearing a veil achieves for the women of the Cairo mosque movement studied by Saba Mahmood. For these women, Mahmood argues, to wear a veil is not just a marker of religious identity or a sign of piety but above all a '*means* by which one trains oneself to be pious' (2001: 214; emphasis in the original). As Mahmood notes, this is an old Aristotelian idea (but see Laidlaw 2014: 75). One becomes just by acting in a just way. One becomes humble and forgiving and a joyful giver by acting *as if* one had all these qualities. And, more generally, one becomes desirous to follow evangelical principles by acting as if one was desirous. From this perspective, exemplarity may serve to represent the values of a culture, but it is also relevant for the exemplars' own self-formation – instilling in them the very values which they represent.

(3) A third account of why servants may be more committed to Christian principles than non-servants takes off from the observation that the former engage into intense spiritual activity much more frequently and for much longer stretches of time.

The spiritual activity of people who do *not* serve in church largely exhausts itself in attending Sunday and, often less regularly, Friday morning services. There, except for actively participating in the joint singing and 'collective-personal prayer'³⁰ of the first third

30 Following Haynes (2017: 64f.) this denotes a prayer style where people pray out loud, usually over a common theme, but with everyone voicing their own thoughts.

of the service, they will mostly listen to how others pray, preach and sing. Often these people also sit rather toward the back of the church, whereas the atmosphere is more intense toward the front. For servants, by contrast, Sunday and Friday services – in which they participate more actively – only make up parts of their total spiritual activity. And the most intense religious experiences, it seems, are made in other contexts.

To begin with, many of the strongly committed Evangelicals in Dell habitually rise in the middle of the night to pray and sing with their families for 30 minutes to an hour. These nightly prayer sessions have a particular atmosphere; it is dark and silent outside and people are in that peculiar state of slowness and heightened impressionability that comes with awakening from sleep. The boundaries of the self, so to speak, are lowered at this time, and the prayers and songs are particularly heartfelt.

Second, each of the different leader groups at church and small groups level meets on one evening per week. They will get together around dusk, and there will be a roughly three hour service in which everyone takes an active role. For long stretches, participants are down on their knees and take turns at praying out loud. The service is followed by supper, and then organizational issues are discussed. The leaders sleep over in their meeting place and continue praying the next morning; on one day per month they fast and pray until lunch. Like the nightly prayer sessions, these leader meetings are marked by a particular intensity: for many hours, a small group of people interacts in a closed-off space and everyone is highly involved, singing, praying out loud, or responding to other people's prayer with hallelujahs.

This kind of atmosphere, finally, is especially sensible during the outings that leader groups and choirs sometimes make to the top of *Ager*, a 3000 metre high volcanic peak that affords stunning views of the surrounding mountains. Having spent the previous night in prayer, a group will leave at half past four in the morning to reach the summit at sunrise. Without food and water, they will spend the next hours praying out loud in the blazing sun.

On all these occasions where those who play an active role in the church come together for prolonged spiritual activity, key religious ideas are communicated. What matters to me at this point, however, is not the content of those ideas but the atmosphere in which they are voiced. Clearly, we here have the kind of 'effervescence' that since Durkheim has been considered a key way in which people come to subjectively identify with the values of their culture (Turner 1967, Joas 2000, Robbins 2015b). Thus, if

exemplary behaviour is one way in which servants cultivate the desire to put Christian values first, their frequent engagement in long and intense spiritual activity is another. Indeed, when I asked people how they felt after praying for many hours, a common reply was that they felt a deep desire to avoid sin.

4.5 Conquering the Spiritual Threats of Development: Church Servants and Economic Withdrawal

I have offered three reasons to support Dell Evangelicals' understanding that serving in church affords 'spiritual strength'. But how, if at all, does this 'strength' manifest in economic practice? In this section I offer examples that give a sense of the impact that Evangelicalism can have when people privilege its values over those of economic development. The examples all concern church servants. I begin with an excerpt from my fieldnotes from early August 2017.

This afternoon I accompanied Mathos and Abraham to Mazenga's place, where the two were to pray for Mazenga's ill daughter. On the way there, Mathos started talking to Abraham about the micro-credit scheme offered by the district for the second or third year in a row. Others in Dell had made good experiences with it. You borrowed 10.000 Birr, bought an ox, raised it for some months, sold it at a profit and returned the loan. Mathos said he qualified for the scheme, since his household was among the poorest in Dell. He had thought about it for some days, he said, but was doubting if it would be a good thing for him to do. His main worry was that it would distract him from his church work because an ox requires a lot of attention if it is to fatten quickly. Here, Abraham jumped in, confirming his friend in his doubts. Additionally, he pointed to the danger that the ox might die. In this case Mathos would be hard-pressed to repay the loan, and 'a believer shouldn't have debts', Abraham said. Even if the ox did not die, there would still be the worry that it might, which would only add to the urge to constantly check on it. Having listened to this, Mathos turned to me, asking 'who leads a good life, the rich or the poor person?' I said I was not sure and asked him what he thought about it. 'The poor person', he answered, 'for the rich man worries about fire or thieves, but the poor person has nothing to worry about.'

I remember being rather surprised by Mathos's decision against taking out a loan. He was indeed among the very poorest in Dell, having no more than half an acre of low-yield farmland to feed a family of eight. As Mathos explained in Chapter 3, he 'didn't even have a lamb', let alone oxen. To be able to plough his land, he was the *wakiwondab* (plowman) of a wealthy man, for whom he had to work ten times in return for the right to use his ox-plough for his purposes nine times. Mathos's four sons were growing up and soon he would have to start paying bridewealth for the oldest one of them. So a little extra money would have been more than welcome. Indeed, we have seen in Chapter 3, Mathos aspired to acquire a female calf, which would grow into a cow, give birth to calves and thus put Mathos on the road to becoming a *wakibab* (cattle owner), who would not have to hire himself out to be able to plough his land. Participation in the micro-credit scheme would likely have given Mathos the money to buy the long-desired calf.

Yet, Mathos decided against participating – a step clearly motivated by religious considerations. Local doctrine does not prohibit taking out loans. But Mathos anticipated that doing so would focus his attention away from serving in the church. He is both a choir and a youth leader, and this means a considerable time-commitment as well as a commitment to exemplary conduct. Raising cattle is commonly recognized in Dell to be quite time-intensive, too. Cattle are tethered on a meadow and one has to change their location several times a day to make sure they get enough grass. This, Mathos feared, might lead him to cut back on his work for the church. To paraphrase his thinking: Once you have an oxen, like it or not, you will start to think about it a lot. Hence, if you want to avoid being drawn into an excessive concern with 'things of the flesh', it is better to not invest in one in the first place. As I have argued above, this kind of heightened consciousness can be linked to the demand that people carry out their church service in a state of purity.

Mathos was far from the only one who was reflective about the spiritual threats of development and who decided to relinquish economic opportunities. This became evident, for instance, when I collected data on *kotsa* – the share-cropping arrangement that we saw in Girta's case, where one party provides the land, and the other provides seeds and labour. Overall *kotsa* has become more widely used over the past decade since land scarcity requires many people to look for additional farming opportunities. Many people now grow grain on their own land and get together with others by way of *kotsa* for growing cash-crops like onions or garlic. Among church leaders and other devout Evangelicals, however, I

found considerable reluctance to engage in *kotsa*. As Girma, a choir leader in his late 30s explained,

‘It’s no good. All it brings you is quarrelling and sadness. The field owner often starts to secretly harvest before the agreed time and then denies it. Maybe you feel like suing him. But that’s bad. Or he terminates the agreement after only one year, and that also makes you sad and leads to fighting. So I have stopped working *kotsa*. It’s better to live in peace.’

I also learnt about another angle from which share-cropping had recently been problematized and restricted. Since the mid 2000s, it had become common for individual married women to enter into *kotsa* arrangements with men. This innovation – women formerly worked only for their husbands – had occurred in response to women’s growing need for cash and their husbands’ reluctance to give them any. By share-cropping with another man, a woman could earn her own money. However, in 2014, the church’s women leaders raised the issue whether it would not be better to prohibit women from share-cropping.

As far as I could ascertain, the immediate cause for this proposition was a case of adultery between a man and a woman who had worked together in this way; and so avoiding adultery was one of the arguments advanced. More fundamentally, however, the women noted that while *kotsa* was economically beneficial for them, it produced much domestic unrest. On the one hand, it led husbands to complain about wives using their time and labour power for their own economic projects. This was wrong, husbands felt, because by paying bridewealth they had acquired the right to their wife’s total labour power. On the other hand, it prompted husbands to be even more stingy when it came to giving their wife a share of the household income, arguing that this was no longer necessary since she now had her own source of income. These male responses, in turn, easily made women angry and thus led to quarrels between the spouses (see Kalinda’s case in Chapter 3 for an example). Quarrels being sinful, the women leaders – aiming to attack the problem at the roots – proposed to prohibit *kotsa* to women. The male church leaders agreed with this, noting also that for women to pursue their own economic projects was an aberration from the Christian principle that a wife is to be ‘below’ her husband. Since this time, the church’s official position has been that individual women should not work *kotsa*. (This does not concern groups of women, as the cell group that worked together with Girma.) Here, then, we have

another instance of committed Evangelicals deciding to relinquish an economic opportunity that is felt to threaten pious living.

Something similar occurs in my final example: Esias had married a few years ago. On this occasion, his father, Kalibab had bequeathed him a meadow for his livestock. But then Kalibab had repeatedly tethered his own cattle in that meadow, working with the traditional (and legally outdated) understanding that even if he passed on land to his sons, it was still really his land. Esias could have challenged him on this by calling the elders who had been present when his father bequeathed the land to him. Esias knew, however, that this would make his father sad; and making others sad, of course, is a sin for Evangelicals. But Esias also knew that he would get sad himself (which is sinful too) if he kept seeing his father's cattle on his meadow, finishing the grass he knew his own livestock needed. Esias therefore decided to rent a meadow from a neighbour for his own livestock and to tell his father that he could graze his cattle on Esias's meadow.

The common theme in these cases, which all concern servants, is that the pursuit of development has a potential to undermine faithfulness to Christian principles. In reaction to this, one observes a tendency to withdraw from economic life. Given the necessity of making a living, this withdrawal cannot go very far (cf. Robbins 2004: 307 for a similar observation from Urapmin). And the complete renunciation of all worldly wealth in favour of a life in poverty clearly is not a goal advocated by Dell Evangelicalism. The critique of development is not a categorical one; pursuing development is fine as long as it does not result in sin. Yet, people recognize that the pursuit of development can easily get out of control. And it is in cognisance of this fact that the more committed Evangelicals in Dell take precautions against being duped by their own desires. These precautions take the form of withdrawal. Rather than fall into sin, these believers prefer to lose out economically.

World-fleeing Asceticism

One way of linking these findings to the ongoing debate about the role of evangelical Christianity in development processes in Africa goes through Weber. When it is suggested that the continent presently witnesses something akin to what Weber described in his thesis on the Protestant ethic, this argument is commonly made by pointing out that many churches preach a gospel of entrepreneurship, hard work, self-assertion in the market place and avoidance of wasteful expenditure (cf. Freeman 2015b). These, of course, are the

hallmarks of what Weber described as ‘inner-worldly asceticism’, and which he thought had been paradigmatically expressed in Calvinism. But Weber also distinguished a second kind of asceticism, which he dubbed ‘world-fleeing’, and which in his conceptual scheme is placed half-way between inner-worldly asceticism and mysticism. This sort of asceticism concentrates on, ‘keeping down and [...] overcoming creatural wickedness in the actor’s own nature’ and ‘enhances the concentration on the firmly established God-willed and redemptory accomplishments to the point of *avoiding any action in the orders of the world*’ (Weber 1946: 326, my emphasis; cf. 1963: 166).

Dell Evangelicalism, I argue, leans toward the world-fleeing rather than toward the inner-worldly variant of asceticism. This was already suggested by the anxieties about social life as a source of sin and the resultant tendency to down-scale social events in length and intensity (Chapter 2). It has now become evident that a similar tendency exists with regard to economic life. Here, the concern with ‘keeping down creatural wickedness’ makes the more committed *amain* desist from using certain economic opportunities – and in this way acts as a limiting factor on their quest for economic advancement. In more general terms we might say that where a church leans toward inner-worldly asceticism, its endorsement of development will be stronger than in the case where it leans toward world-fleeing asceticism.

4.6 Conclusion

In Chapter 2 I suggested that Evangelicalism played a part in what Dell people lament as a decline of respect. I argued that this was so inasmuch as the evangelical quest to avoid sin led to a reduction in commensality. Indeed, one could say that Evangelicalism – in requiring much less expenditure for feasting than *karta* – also (unintendedly) contributed to the decline of respect by helping development take off. This is an argument Dena Freeman has made forcefully for the Gamo Highlands. There, Pentecostalism facilitated an economic boom because converts no longer faced traditional redistributive demands and could reinvest the money they made through a newly introduced cash crop (Freeman 2012b: 174f.). Over time, the fervent quest for prosperity that Pentecostalism had helped to create, led to social problems akin to the ones observed in Dell: aggressive competition, use of illegitimate means to gain economic advantage, envy, conflict and so on (Freeman 2015a: 162ff.). Freeman’s article does not contain information on whether the Gamo church now

tries to remedy the problems it has contributed to create. But in Dell, at least, the church does work in this direction. As I have shown in this chapter, the church here is much less sanguine about development than evangelical churches elsewhere have been reported to be – and this is directly related to the sense that development challenges the vision of a world in which people are united in humility and mutual respect. Evangelicalism in Dell, in other words, may have played a role in the decline of respect, but it currently is also one of the strongest forces to push back against this decline.

In the bulk of this chapter, I have aimed to understand under what conditions the evangelical defence of respect succeeds. I approached this question by asking what leads some believers to be ‘spiritually strong’. Based on Dell people’s own understanding, I made two main points. First, I pointed to the importance of the concept of divine punishment. By interpreting illness and other problems as the result of sin, local Evangelicalism effectively communicates to people that there is no trade-off between obeying God and getting ahead economically: God will take away what you have gained illegitimately. I have suggested that it is particularly by learning this message the hard way, through experiencing God’s wrath, that people come to appreciate the need to not sacrifice Christian values to the pursuit of development. Second, I observed that Evangelicals in Dell attribute high value to serving in church and that they conceive of serving as a way to cultivate ‘spiritual strength’. I gave three reasons why their understanding also makes sense from an analytical point of view: servants are stimulated to regularly evaluate their own conduct, thoughts and emotions in Christian terms; by acting in an exemplary fashion servants (re)produce in themselves the commitment they display to others; and servants make intense religious experiences of the type that foster value commitment. As I showed in my final section, the commitment and reflexivity cultivated in church has a tangible effect on economic practice, leading servants to turn their back on economic opportunities if these threaten to lead them into sin.

In closing, I would like to offer a fourth and final point why this kind of more restricted economic practice is possible for servants. This point picks up from the observation made in Chapter 3, that people’s pursuit of development is motivated by the aspiration to have a ‘name’. In other words, where people sacrifice Christian values to the quest for development, it is not wealth per se which motivates their conduct but the quest for reputation or ‘greatness’. This, however, leads on to the question whether there is not also a way to build a name on the basis of strict adherence to Christian principles. Brendan

Thornton, for example, in an ethnography of Pentecostalism in the Dominican Republic found that men who had previously built their reputation through aggressive masculinity and gang life, after conversion could gain ‘prestige/respect’ based on their ‘ability to embody time-honored cultural ideals associated with the “good Christian”’ (2016: 190).

Something similar can be said for the case of church servants in Dell. Especially leaders have a high reputation. To begin with, this becomes visible in the way leaders are treated by others. Here one observes signs of respect typically shown to those ranking high in the social hierarchy (cf. Chapter 1). For instance, when called to someone’s house to pray for a sick person, leaders will be offered the best available chairs, they will be addressed in the honorific plural, food will be prepared for them and they will be invited to wash their hands before everyone else. The value of humility commands that leaders do not visibly revel in this, let alone actively demand to be treated with special respect. But this does not change the fact that they are being treated in an honorific way. Likewise, in church, leaders sit in an elevated spot and on a large bench that is more impressive than the rickety benches everyone else sits on; on certain occasions, like the monthly celebration of the Eucharist, they wear impressive silk-gowns. Such gowns, which are locally much admired, are also worn by the members of the first and the second of the six choirs (see above Figure 13).

And not only are those who occupy high positions in the church *de facto* marked out as worthy of respect. They are also conscious of the recognition others grant them. One instance where this became particularly clear to me was during the scene with Mathos described above. Remember how after deciding to not take out the loan, Mathos commented to me that it were the poor rather than the rich who led good lives because they did not have to worry about thieves or fire. He then walked on in silence for some moments, before he suddenly asserted that while there were men in Dell who were very rich, it was church leaders like him and Abraham that people were ‘really afraid of’ (*gatsi woken bashebashdek*). This assertion is significant because inspiring fear is locally taken as a key feature of ‘great persons’: in awe of their achievements or faculties others take on a humble attitude and speak admiringly about them. In the case of church leaders this reverence is founded on the feats they perform for others – resolving conflicts that seem beyond resolution, healing those who seem lost, praying and preaching with a strength that moves others to overcome their spiritual weakness.

I have explained above that the precondition for being allowed to serve in church is to live in strict obedience to God's law. It is also true that within the group of servants it is the more righteous who serve in higher positions. To be elected a leader one has to demonstrate particular piety. The same applies for moving up into higher choirs, with choir membership being decided not on the basis of the quality of a person's voice, but exclusively in terms of the quality of their conduct.³¹ The implication of this is that gaining reputation on the basis of serving in church presupposes strict adherence to God's law. This, in turn, means that for those who serve in a leading position, relinquishing wealth in accordance with evangelical principles does not actually stand in contradiction to achieving a great name. On the contrary, when someone like Mathos decides against taking out a loan to safe-guard his righteousness, this is actually the precondition for continuing to be admired. Were he to buy the ox and, as he feared, reduce his work for the church, he would lose the esteem others now have for him.

For a sub-section of Dell Evangelicals, then, there is an alternative way to build a name, which goes not through wealth but through righteousness. These people, in other words, can realize through Evangelicalism a value which other people can only realize through the pursuit of development. Exemplary servants therefore do not face a conflict between building their name and being respectful of others. It is by being paragons of humility that they achieve greatness. Yet, not everyone can serve in church, and not every servant can be a leader – just as not everyone comes to experience God's wrath. If these indeed are the factors that lead people to privilege Christian over developmental values, the church's defence of respect will continue to face challenges. At the same time, this chapter hopes to have shown that without Evangelicalism the chances for respect in times of development would be much bleaker. It is by holding alive the vision of a world in which people are united in humility and mutual respect that evangelical Christianity makes a difference in Dell.

³¹ Choir members who commit a serious sin are banned from serving in church for a couple months. Afterwards, they join the lowest ranking choir and only gradually move up as positions in higher choirs become available.

Chapter 5. From Fasting to Feasting: Reputation and Respect in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity

5.1 Introduction

Headed by a heavysset, long-bearded priest with a red hat and chanting religious songs (mezmur), the Orthodox congregation slowly moved toward the centre of the market square. It had rained the night before, but now the sky had cleared and a fresh wind was blowing across the lush rolling hills and the main village's tin-roofed houses glistened in the April sun. White *gabi* vestments wrapped around their bodies, people wore headbands made of palm leaves and some held dark-green reeds in their hands. Upon reaching the centre of the market square, the 60 or so men, women and children formed a circle around a teenage girl, who was beating a large skin-covered drum (kebero). They intensified their chanting, moving rhythmically, clapping and ululating.

It was Hosanna or Palm Sunday and the procession through the village was to commemorate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Earlier that morning, the priest who had come down from Saint George church at Bako, had preached about Hosanna. It was the last Sunday before Easter, he had explained, and during the following week Orthodox Christians were to respect a number of rules such as not making the sign of the cross or not shaking hands with others. He had also explained that to remember Jesus's suffering, a person of strong faith should go barefoot and refrain from having sexual intercourse. Finally, the priest had talked about the rules for breaking the fast. After 55 days of avoiding all animal products, it was permitted to slaughter chicken after eight o'clock in the evening on Holy Saturday and to eat meat after three o'clock on Easter morning. These details clarified, the group had set out on its round through the village, beating their drum and chanting – and impressing on-lookers with a sense that Orthodox Christianity had come to Dell to stay.

The Emergence of Orthodoxy in Dell

Had my introductory scene been set in northern Ethiopia, it would have been the most ordinary of scenes. For, there, Orthodox Christianity has been practised for many centuries. In Dell, however, hundreds of kilometres to the south of the Orthodox heartlands, the image of white-clad worshippers – so often associated with Ethiopia as a whole – is a novel one. Here, an Ethiopian Orthodox community has only emerged since 2010. In that year, a

handful of elders – followed by their wives and children – left *karta* (traditional practice) and decided to become Orthodox. This move had not been prompted by proselytization. Rather, the elders themselves reached out to deacons from churches in the towns of Gob and Sinigal, inviting them to come up to Dell and teach them about Orthodoxy. For the purpose of these classes, a meeting place was found in a house in the main village. Half a year later, in 2011, a piece of land adjacent to the village was obtained from the *kebele* (local administration) and a hut was built. Hut and ground were consecrated and dedicated to Saint Gabriel by a priest from the largest Orthodox church in the provincial capital, Jinka. In 2016, having grown in members and wealth, the congregation replaced the hut with a more spacious, tin-roofed house. Like its predecessor, this house lacks a *tabot*³² and therefore counts as a ‘prayer house’ (*tselet bet*) rather than as a full church (*beta kristian*). Presently the Orthodox community – through joint agricultural work and the collection of tithes – is striving to accumulate wealth to build an even larger, octagonal, cement floor house. This, it is understood, would allow them to receive a *tabot* and to become a full church. When I counted in August 2017, the congregation had 73 adult members (31 men, 42 women), alongside 18 youths and numerous children. There has been considerable growth since the original foundation in 2010, then, and during a return trip to Dell in September 2018, I learnt that yet more people had joined the church. In short, Orthodoxy in Dell, though still small when compared to Evangelicalism, is very much on the rise.

Questions and Arguments

This chapter aims to account for the rise of Orthodox Christianity in Dell. Why have some people abandoned *karta* and become Orthodox? What makes Orthodoxy attractive to them? And what sort of change does conversion mean?

I argue that Orthodoxy is attractive because it allows for a fuller realization of two values, which, as we know from previous chapters, are of key concern to people in Dell: *nami* (name, reputation, respectability) and *bonshmi* (respect, respectful interaction).

In recent years, to not have a ‘religion’ (*haymanot*) has become a source of shame (*oshin*), a damage to one’s name. Conversion solves this problem and makes one more respectable in other people’s eyes. Indeed, to become Orthodox even contributes to building a *great* name: Orthodoxy is associated with the Gamma (Northern Ethiopians), and to

³² The *tabot* is a wooden replica of the Ark of the Covenant placed in the innermost sanctuary of a church, which is only accessible to priests (cf. Boylston 2018: 52).

become Orthodox is to partake in their greatness. At the same time, Orthodoxy allows to revitalize *bonshmi*, the decline of which, as we know, people in Dell deplore. Feasting (next to fasting) is a key form of lay religious involvement in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (Boylston 2018: 37, Malara 2018). Feasting, however, is also central to produce the relations and interactions that afford *bonshmi*. While the feasting associated with *karta* has come under attack as an expression of ‘backwardness’ (cf. Chapter 3), Orthodox feasting carries the seal of religious legitimacy. Orthodoxy, then, allows people to cultivate respectful interactions through feasting without endangering their name.

By arguing that people take Orthodoxy as a way to better realize established values, this chapter offers a final instantiation of my argument about values as drivers of change. But with what sort of change are we dealing here specifically? In earlier chapters I showed that to draw on new cultural means to better realize established values may require substantive changes in one’s practice. To what extent does this apply for Orthodoxy, too? Or does participation in Orthodoxy require less of a change? The latter certainly is what most literature on conversion to Orthodoxy would suggest. Scholars have repeatedly argued that while Protestant conversion may be characterized by ‘rupture’, conversion to Orthodoxy allows for greater continuities with people’s pre-conversion selves or cultures (Winchester 2013: 13; Carrol 2018: 89). As Freeman (2018: 7) notes in a recent summary of this literature, Orthodoxy,

‘often encourages, or at least accepts, the inclusion of pre-Christian practices by Orthodox Christians ... Therefore, it is not surprising that most ethnographic examples of Orthodox Christianity exhibit what its scholars variously call “hybridity” or “syncretism”.’

The findings of this chapter allow me to challenge this view. I show that converts – far from trying to ‘syncretize’ *karta* with Orthodoxy – stress the need to discontinue *karta* and to strictly follow the rules of Orthodoxy, especially those on fasting. I show that this personal and collective investment in discontinuity is necessary to successfully realize the value of ‘name’ through Orthodoxy: It is only by demonstrating that one has undergone a real change that one gains the respectability Orthodoxy is hoped to afford. If Orthodoxy in Dell still in some ways appears as continuous with traditional practice, this is not a matter of ‘syncretism’ but a result of affinities between these two cultural systems.

In the following, I first offer some historical background information on Orthodoxy in this part of southern Ethiopia. I then examine the reasons for conversion to Orthodoxy and what sort of change conversion is thought to entail. Finally, I look at the social and religious life of the Orthodox congregation. In the conclusion, I link my findings to broader debates about conversion to Orthodoxy.



Figure 14. The Orthodox Church in Dell

5.2 Historical Background

Orthodox Christianity first came to Aariland in the wake of the region's conquest by the Abyssinian empire at the turn of the 20th century. The Northern soldier-settlers (*neftenya*) were accompanied by priests, and during the 1910s, churches were established in newly founded garrison towns like Bako (Naty 1992: 116, 88). However, it was not until the 1940s that efforts to Christianize the Aari started to be made (ibid.: 186). These efforts were motivated, firstly, by emperor Haile Selassie's attempt to create national unity across ethnic

lines. The need for unity had been highlighted by the Italian occupation (1935-1940), during which some Southerners had collaborated with the Italians in an attempt to get rid of their Northern oppressors. Secondly, Christianity was seen as a means to civilize the people of the South, whose purportedly ‘savage’ customs, such as going naked, posed a challenge to Ethiopia’s self-image as a civilized nation (ibid: 187-191; see also Donham 1986: 11f.).

According to Naty, the 1940s saw mass-baptisms in which Aari people were sprinkled with Holy Water, received a Christian name and were assigned a *neftenya* as godparent. A key argument to promote conversion was that it would lead to greater equality with Northerners. As one old man whom Naty (1992: 187) interviewed in the late 1980s recalled: ‘They told us to wear clothes. The priests also said that the Amhara and Aari would be like older and younger brother. They told us that the distinction between the Amhara and Aari ended the day that we were baptized.’

Naty does not specify how widespread or effective these conversion campaigns were. For the case of Dell, however, it is clear that at least some people did indeed become Orthodox. Several elders recalled that during their childhood in the 1950s, their fathers had kept the Orthodox fast and had gone up to Bako for major Orthodox holidays. Some also recalled that their fathers had been organized in a mahber. Common throughout Orthodox Christian Ethiopia, such ‘associations’ meet on one day per month to feast in the name of a Saint (Binns 2017: 240ff.; Boylston 2018: 39). Despite their engagement with Orthodoxy, however, these people also continued to participate in lineage rituals and other *karta* practices. This resonates with Dena Freeman’s observation that in the Gamo Highlands, where people converted some time after conquest, people ‘continued practising their traditional rituals and customs and simply added on a thin extra layer of Orthodox Christianity’ (2018: 7). For this period, then, the relation between Orthodoxy and *karta* in Dell could be described as ‘syncretistic’.

By the 1960s, according to my interlocutors’ memories, their fathers had abandoned Orthodoxy and no longer kept the fast or feasted in *mahber* groups. This corresponds to Naty’s finding that most people stopped being Orthodox after a while. Naty suggests that this was because the promised equality between Aari and Amhara failed to materialize. Not only did Northerners continue to call Aari by the derogatory term ‘shankila’ (1992: 186). Naty’s interlocutors also suggested that godparents made excessive demands for chickens, sheep and honey (ibid.: 201), using godparenthood as an additional avenue for economic

exploitation. Elders in Dell were unsure why their fathers had abandoned Orthodoxy, though it is likely that they had concerns similar to the ones reported by Naty. In any case, it was to take another half century before people in Dell once again engaged with Orthodoxy. It is to the reasons for this recent engagement that I now turn.

5.3 For Blessings and Name: Reasons for Conversion to Orthodoxy

In August 2017, the Orthodox congregation had 91 members. There were 18 unmarried teenagers as well as 42 married women and 31 married men. Of these 91 members, only 20 had converted on their own initiative. These were all men, most of them above fifty years of age and considered '*galta*' (elders). The remainder of the congregation had become Orthodox in the 20 elders' wake: There were eleven younger, married men who had followed their fathers into the church. The 42 women, in turn, had all converted when their husbands had become Orthodox. (The higher number of women is due to polygyny.) And the teenagers had converted in the wake of their parents. The reason for this ripple effect of the 20 elders' conversion is simple: all of those who today form the Orthodox congregation had prior to their conversion followed *karta*. In the local understanding, however, it is not possible to participate in *karta* if your husband or father does not do so either. Hence, when the elders left *karta*, their dependents had to follow suit.³³ This does not mean that the latter have no genuine interest in being Orthodox. It does mean, however, that to explain the rise of Orthodoxy in Dell, the main task is to explain why the elders converted. In the following, I show that most conversions were triggered by conflicts with lineage heads, but that concerns about 'name' were what really motivated these elders' engagement with Orthodoxy.

Toidi-Troubles

As a way into this analysis, consider the following account of an episode which occurred around 2008, two years prior to the foundation of the Orthodox church in Dell. The speaker

33 By contrast, where the wives or children of a man had been *amain* prior to the man's conversion to Orthodoxy, they commonly remained so. In Kalibab's case, for instance, his first wife, three of his married sons, and three of his unmarried children had been *amain* prior to Kalibab's conversion to Orthodoxy, and they did not follow him into Orthodoxy. His second and third wife, as well as his first son, and four of his unmarried children, by contrast, had participated in *karta* and became Orthodox when Kalibab converted. (His second wife has since stopped following Orthodoxy. She now considers herself as being 'on her own' (*gurri*), i.e. neither *amain* nor *alem* nor Orthodox.)

is Geshabab, the first convert from Dell, who at the time of our interview in 2017 was in his mid-70s.

After I had finished paying bridewealth for my new wife, we spent three days in a hut, as is our custom. When we left the hut, I asked my *toidi* (lineage head) when we could come to do the *anza-kash* (ritual through which the bride becomes part of her husband's lineage). At first he said he was too busy. So I begged him and begged him, and finally he told me a day. But the next morning he sent a messenger to tell me that the *anza-kash* had to be postponed because he had to go elsewhere. This happened several times. It was very bad! I wanted to plant wheat in my field in Gedir [located to the west of Dell, beyond a stream], but in our *karta* it's taboo to cross a stream until the *anza-kash* has been done. Also, the bride is not allowed to work. Finally, Askalbab [the *toidi*] said we should come the following Friday. So we prepared beer and on that Friday went to the *kashi* (the lineage's ritual site). But when we got there, it was said that Askalbab had gone to town. I was very angry. How was I going to sow if we didn't do the *anza-kash*?! I said, "that's enough for me, I'll become *Gamma Kristian*". So I took the beer and went home. Some days later, there was an Orthodox holiday at Bako, and I went there and became Orthodox.

In brief, Geshabab's problem was this: His *toidi* repeatedly postponed – and thus effectively refused – to carry out a ritual for him. As a consequence, Geshabab was unable to sow his field. For if he crossed a stream prior to the ritual, he or a member of his household would be harmed by *gomma*. Conversion to Orthodoxy solved this problem for Geshabab. As in the case of conversion to Evangelicalism, conversion to Orthodoxy means no longer being subject to the rules of *karta*. The ritual of *anza-kash*, however, only is a part of *karta* but not of Orthodoxy. Hence, if one is Orthodox, harm cannot arise if one does not carry out this ritual (cf. Donham 1999: 116 for similar understandings in Maale).

Geshabab's case is exemplary, since almost all of the other elders reported similar problems. Kalibab, for instance, recounted how his *toidi*, Gamibab, had refused to carry out the first milk ritual for him. One evening, Kalibab had placed a calabash with milk in the lineage's ritual site, for Gamibab to bless it the next morning. But when Kalibab stepped out of his house the next day to go to attend the ritual, he saw that Gamibab had returned the calabash. This meant that he was not going to bless the milk. On another occasion, Gamibab refused to castrate a bull of Kalibab's. Like tasting new milk, castration is an exclusive right

of the *toidi*, and to castrate on one's own would mean *gomma*. When Kalibab desperately asked how he was going to drink his milk or fatten his cattle if Gamibab refused to carry out the necessary rituals, Gamibab allegedly barked at him to, 'Go away from me, become *amain* or Orthodox!' And this was what Kalibab did indeed do before long. Following Geshabab's example – and together with other elders who had been rejected by their lineage heads – Kalibab turned to Orthodoxy as a new source of blessings.

To explain conversion to Orthodoxy, then, two questions need to be answered: Why did these elders' lineage heads refuse to carry out rituals for them? And why did the elders not use traditional means to deal with this problem, but instead converted to Orthodoxy, which was unestablished in Dell at that time?

From Chapter 1 we know that in *karta* seniors often remind juniors of their dependence and push them to show respect by withholding from them what juniors are in need of – land, permissions, blessings and so on. Lineage heads, in particular, are known to act in this way. It is very common for a *toidi* to give his juniors the runaround, and to only agree to carry out a ritual after having been 'begged' for a while. As Geshabab tells us above, 'at first [the *toidi*] said he was too busy. So I begged him and begged him, and finally he told me a day [to do the ritual].' However, sometimes the *toidi* sticks to his refusal. This usually happens when there is a conflict between him and the suppliant and, particularly, when the *toidi* feels that the other has not been showing him proper respect. Indeed, a closer look at the Orthodox elders' cases reveals entrenched conflicts with lineage heads. While each case has its specificities, it is possible to distinguish two main types of conflicts. These are exemplified by the cases of Kalibab and Geshabab respectively.

To understand the conflict between Kalibab and his *toidi* Gamibab, one has to understand that, in Dell, Kalibab is widely thought to have a much greater name than Gamibab (who is his older brother; same father, different mother). For one thing, this is because Kalibab is wealthier. While Gamibab owns almost three times more land, Kalibab is more hard-working and less prone to squander money on drinks. He therefore owns more cattle than Gamibab and has more wives, children and affines. He also owns a 'townhouse' in the main village, from which he collects rent; and his own house is equipped with cushioned chairs, a solar light and a mattress. Gamibab, by contrast, only has one house, which is equipped with no more than a couple of stools and a self-made wooden bedstead. Beyond his wealth, Kalibab is also highly respected for his public virtue. He is renowned as

a skilful conflict mediator, and many remember him as an excellent leader of *mol'a* work groups, an office which he held for twelve years. He also worked as a judge on the local social court for two years, and he was one of the first from Dell to send a child to secondary school. All this makes Kalibab one of the most highly respected elders in Dell – a ‘great man’ (*gaeshabab*) much greater than Gamibab, who is mainly known for his fiery temper which frequently brings him into conflict with others.

That Kalibab should be ‘greater’ than him, clearly wounds Gamibab’s pride. This became particularly evident in moments of drunkenness when Gamibab often ranted about Kalibab being ‘*balافت*’ – a derogatory term derived from the Amharic word for ‘rich person’. Gamibab also repeatedly complained to me that people only ever called on Kalibab when they needed a mediator, but not on him. All this gave Gamibab a sense of being dwarfed by his younger brother. I suggest that it was this sense of being dwarfed which motivated Gamibab’s refusal to carry out rituals for Kalibab. As lineage head, Gamibab expects to be the greatest from among his kin. When his junior is publicly recognized as greater, this for Gamibab feels like a form of disrespect. He reacts in the way *toidis* commonly react to disrespect: by withholding their blessing.

Similar dynamics are apparent in many of the other cases. Several of the Orthodox elders belong to the richest people in Dell, whereas their lineage heads are much less well off. Others have served in leading positions in the *kebele*, or have distinguished themselves in *karta* offices, e.g. as Dell’s envoys to meetings with the ritual king. In brief, the Orthodox church appears as a meeting ground of parts of the local meritocratic elite (the other part being rich *amain* men). The achieved status of these people rubs uneasily against their *toidis*’ claims to (descent-based) superiority. This, I suggest, is what in many cases accounts for conflicts and lineage heads’ eventual refusal to serve as a source of blessings.

A second type of conflict is exemplified by the case of Geshabab and his *toidi* Askalbab. To understand their case, one has to know something about their kinship relation. Askalbab and Geshabab are both first sons. Their fathers, Wulako and Eri, were brothers and Wulako was the elder brother. Until his untimely death in the early 1970s, Wulako was *toidi* of Oni lineage. After his death, Eri became *toidi*. Eri died in the early 1990s. At this point only one of Eri’s younger brothers, Soyta, was still alive. This man served as *toidi* for some years. When he died, the lineage headship passed down one generation and Wulako’s first son, Askalbab, became *toidi*. Geshabab’s and Askalbab’s relation had never been an

easy one since both were rich and competed for who was 'greater'. These tensions were intensified when Askalbab became Geshabab's *toidi*, since Geshabab now had to bow to Askalbab's authority. Geshabab did so and relied on Askalbab to carry out rituals for him. At the same time, however, Geshabab also started to challenge Askalbab's authority. Geshabab claimed that, on his deathbed, Eri had told him that once Soyta had died, the Oni lineage should segment. In that case, Askalbab would be the *toidi* of the descendants of Wulako, and Geshabab would become *toidi* for the descendants of Eri. Indeed, while Soyta was lineage head, Geshabab obtained from him a particular knife. After Soyta's death, when Askalbab had become *toidi*, Geshabab used this knife to sacrifice sheep for his father, Eri. He also started to carry out for his own sons certain minor rituals, which would usually have been the prerogative of Askalbab. This clearly angered Askalbab and was perceived by him as a grave sign of disrespect. Against this background, the logic behind his above-mentioned refusal to carry out the *anza-kash* for Geshabab becomes clear. It could be paraphrased like this: 'If you slaughter sheep for your father and perform rituals for your descendants, then why do you need me to do *anza-kash* for you? Do you not purport to be *toidi* yourself?'

Next to Geshabab, there are four other elders in the Orthodox Church who are heads of their respective lineage's highest-ranking junior segment. This means that while there is not a single lineage head in the Orthodox church, five out of twenty elders could have *become toidi*, had they pushed for lineage segmentation. There is a real question, then, as to why these people chose to become Orthodox rather than to become *toidi*. A similar question applies for the other elders: Traditionally, men who could not come to terms with their lineage heads, were assigned what could be called an 'ersatz *toidi*': an elder from a lineage in the same moiety, who would carry out rituals for them as if he were their *toidi*. Sometimes, such relations lasted for years, until the formerly rejected could return to his original *toidi* because the latter had changed his mind, or because he had died and been succeeded by a more cooperative person. So why did these elders not make use of an 'ersatz *toidi*', a step which would have allowed them to continue following *karta*? The fact that they preferred to convert to Orthodoxy suggests that there was more at issue for them than just a concern with blessings – for blessings they could also have secured through traditional means.

The Shame of Being Alem

One or two years prior to his conversion, Kalibab found himself in an awkward situation. As in previous years, he had gone down to Jinka when Easter approached, taking along eggs, butter and two chickens. These gifts were for a man called Tesfay, who had once shown great kindness to Kalibab's son, Esias. Around 2002, Esias had moved to Jinka, to attend secondary school. At the time, this was a novel and daunting thing to do. Jinka was not only expensive. It was also deemed a Gamma place, where – in the absence of relatives and required to speak Amharic – it was hard for an Aari to live. Therefore, Kalibab and his family were relieved and grateful when the parents of one of Esias's new schoolmates (both of them Gamma) offered Esias to live with them for free. Since that time, Kalibab has worked to reciprocate Tesfay's hospitality through annual gifts. On one such occasion, Kalibab told me, Tesfay invited him to a bar:

'We sat there for a while, drinking beer. Then a priest came in. All the men went up to him and kissed his cross. It was very nice to see! [admiringly] But then they asked me, "what about you? You are an elder, you are a father of children – what about you?" What was I going to do?! I didn't wear a cross around my neck [as the Orthodox do]. So I said, "I'm *amain*". Later, when we had left the bar, Tesfay scolded me. "You should become Orthodox. Don't remain Aari!" he said.'

To understand this passage, you have to know that Kalibab in reality was *alem* at that time, not *amain* (Evangelical). Tesfay knew this, but kept quiet while they were in the bar. Afterwards, however, he urged Kalibab to not 'remain Aari' (which here stands as a synonym for '*alem*'). When I asked Kalibab why he had lied to the men in the bar, he replied as follows:

'You have to be either *amain* or Orthodox. If you are *alem*, they laugh at you, they laugh out loud! They don't like it when you are *alem*. "That one eats dead animals; that one eats dirty things", they say. They belittle you (*am naxnaxdek*).'

Kalibab's lie, then, grew out of an acute awareness of Gamma people's disdain for the 'heathen' Aari, in general, and their Orthodox disgust at practices like eating the meat of animals that had not been slaughtered, in particular. Indeed, to tell a white lie was all the more necessary for Kalibab since, by addressing him as 'elder' and 'father of children', the other men had already imputed a certain respectability to him. His humiliation would have been all the greater, then, had he revealed himself as *alem*.

Kalibab's move to present himself as an Evangelical points us to what has become an ever more pressing issue for *alem* people in Dell: a sense of shame at not having a 'religion'. To be sure, the sentiment itself is an old one. Ever since the time of conquest, Christian Northerners have demeaned locals for the 'backwardness' of their material culture as much as for being 'heathens'. However, in recent years, two factors have led to an increase in the shame that *alem* people experience.

First, more people now entertain personal relations with Gamma. This is especially true of wealthier people (and remember that the Orthodox converts are predominantly wealthy). Some own houses in Jinka, and this has made them neighbours to Gamma people. Others have established relationships with Gamma to trade livestock or grain. Yet others, like Kalibab, have come into personal relation with Gamma due to the educational pursuits of their children. The case of Kalibab illustrates how such relations can matter with regard to shame. Kalibab may have long been aware that Gamma look down on non-Christian Aari. But there is a difference between being critiqued by relatively remote others and being critiqued by people whose opinion one cares about. To be told by Tesfay to 'not remain Aari', certainly had a deep effect on Kalibab, who looks up to Tesfay and, indeed, feels himself indebted to him. More generally, increased personal interaction with Gamma means that people come to see themselves more frequently through Gamma eyes. This, I suggest, is one factor that leads to a heightened sense that to be *alem* means to lack in respectability.

A second, yet more important factor relates to the rise of evangelical Christianity. *Karta* has been an object of critique ever since the first local church was founded in 1991. To this day, sermons delivered at funerals, weddings or other events attended by Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals alike, commonly involve statements about *alem* people 'living in the dark' or having been 'fooled by Satan'. However, while *alem* people were once able to shrug off this critique as the misguided view of a minority, they have now become the minority themselves. This makes it more difficult to ignore the suggestion that *karta* is fundamentally flawed and nothing more than a relict of the 'old days' (*enna sets*) when people just did not know any better. It is true that, in light of their ethos of respect, Dell Evangelicals hardly ever openly sneer at others for being *alem*. Nonetheless, *alem* people are keenly aware that Evangelicals ultimately look down on them. As several of the Orthodox elders recalled, in the years prior to their conversion, their own children – *amain*

as well as *alem* – had urged them to give up *karta* by arguing that to be *alem* was detrimental to their father's reputation.

To be *alem*, then, has increasingly become a source of shame, a blemish on one's name. This is particularly problematic for elderly men who, in other regards, have what it takes to have a great name – dependents, affines, modern forms of wealth, personal histories of public service and distinction, and so on. For these people, conversion to Orthodoxy offers an effective way to address this issue. To become Orthodox brings not just increased recognition from Gamma. It also turns one into a person whom *amain* acknowledge as a fellow Christian. While Dell Evangelicals do have their misgivings about Orthodoxy (especially relating to its permissive stance on alcohol), they do not articulate these publicly. Thus, whereas no evangelical public event goes by without an explicit critique of *karta*, Orthodoxy is never attacked in this way. Similarly, whenever *amain* go out to evangelize in Dell, church leaders stress that people should not target the Orthodox but only the *alem* people. In brief, to become Orthodox is to stop being someone whom others look down on as a 'person without religion' (*haymanot jint dakibab*). It takes away the blemish from one's name.

My argument, then, is that conversion to Orthodoxy is mainly motivated by the desire to realize the value of name more fully than is possible when one is *alem*. As I go on to show in the final part of this section, Orthodoxy is an excellent means to this end. It not only takes away the blemish from one's name but even helps to magnify this name.

Conversion as Purification – Becoming Gamma through Orthodoxy

As a way into my argument that Orthodoxy helps to magnify people's name, consider the following two accounts of what is involved in becoming Orthodox. The first is from Kalibab, the second from Masmaybab, another elder.

'When I had attended our meetings [of the newly formed Orthodox group] for some months, the teacher [deacon] said to us: 'You have to go down to Holy Mary [Orthodox church in Sinigal] for *Ginbot 21* ['Mary's Birthday'] if you want to obtain purity (*nytsunet afken*). After that day you will not obtain purity. You must go for the day when the *Berri* [God; here referring to the *tabot*] leaves the church.' So on the evening preceding that day I went, together with Losha and Unta [his two youngest sons] and some other people from our group. In Sinigal many people were assembled. We elders

were shown into a tin-roofed house. We were served *inzera* [a sourdough-risen flatbread typical of northern Ethiopia] and meat, and then we slept. Early the next morning, a priest went around, ringing a bell and telling us to get up. Outside we all formed a queue. Unta and Losha were before me. The priest dipped their heads into a basin with water and also sprinkled water over their backs. He told them their Christian name and tied a cross around their neck. Then he dipped my head under water, and told me my Christian name, Wolde Mariam. ... After this we were led back to the house in which we had slept. We were given something that tasted like honey and took a sip of something that also tasted of honey, and we were told to sit in silence and swallow it slowly. When we had done this, we went out to see the *tabot* and the dancing. The priest told us to not abandon our religion. Then we went home.’ (Kalibab)

‘After we had built the [hut] church, we all gave money and grain. We slaughtered a sheep and called a great Orthodox priest from Jinka, called Babos. He came in the evening. He was very fat and had a long beard. He looked like God himself, and when you saw him you got afraid (*bashi*; in the positive, admiring sense). We feasted with him. The next morning, Babos prayed for a long time. He repeatedly touched the ground with his cross, saying ‘pure, pure’ (*nytsu, nytsu*). Then he stuck a cross into the ground next to our hut and from a flask poured some oily substance on the cross; it is like the blood of [Saint] Gabriel. He also sprinkled water over us, murmuring ‘pure, pure’. All this was to render *xantsa*-like what had been *manna*-like (*manna bish matsaxink, xantsa bish masiken*).’ (Masmaybab)

Both of these accounts foreground the topic of purification. Kalibab reports that the deacon urged the members of the newly formed Orthodox group to ‘obtain purity’ by becoming baptized; and he describes how this involved having one’s head dipped under water and swallowing a honey-like substance. Masmaybab talks about how Babos murmured ‘pure, pure’ while consecrating the church ground and sprinkling people with water. It is also noticeable that Kalibab and Masmaybab both use the Amharic ‘*nytsu*’ (pure/clean) rather than its Aari’af equivalent ‘*ch’ili*’. In the local understanding Amharic is superior to, and hence purer than Aari’af. So to use the Amharic term for ‘clean/pure’ further emphasizes the purity that Orthodoxy affords.

Kalibab’s and Masmaybab’s accounts reveal the understanding that to become Orthodox involves a transformation in the substance of one’s being, making pure what used

to be impure. But what exactly is the impurity they think is cleansed away? In the deacon's and priest's view, it is certainly the impurity that comes from sin. But what is it in the understanding of converts in Dell?

Here, it is instructive to consider Masmaybab's suggestion that Babos's ritual acts rendered '*xantsa*-like what had been *manna*-like'. (Remember that *manna* are low-caste people who do not intermarry or eat together with the high-caste *xantsa*.) Masmaybab's interpretation of Babos's acts is striking, because there is not actually a single *manna* among the Orthodox converts. In fact, it was repeatedly emphasized that *manna* would not even be allowed to come *near* the church, since this would lead to pollution. And not only are all converts *xantsa*. They all also belong to high-ranking lineages that are deemed to be particularly pure. Why then does Masmaybab refer to the elders as '*manna*-like'? And what is meant by saying that they are rendered '*xantsa*-like'? To understand this, remember that Dell people commonly describe their relation to the Gamma through the following equation: 'Aari relate to Gamma as *manna* relate to *xantsa*', i.e. Aari are impure and inferior. In Masmaybab's understanding, then, it is not the impurity of sin which is cleansed away by becoming Orthodox, but the impurity linked to being Aari: Through the priest's ritual acts, Aari people are purified and turned into Gamma.

That one 'becomes Gamma' through Orthodoxy is indeed a shared understanding among converts in Dell. Above, we have already encountered this understanding implicitly when Kalibab reported Tesfay to have said, 'You should become Orthodox. Don't remain Aari!' We also heard Geshabab recount how, faced with his obstinate lineage head, he said to himself, 'that's enough for me, I'll become *Gamma Kristian*'. 'Gamma Kristian', in fact, is the self-designation Orthodox people in Dell most commonly employ. And that one has become Gamma is also expressed in dress, language and demeanour. Converts discard *alem* charms and instead wear around the neck a wooden cross typical throughout Orthodox Ethiopia. They frequently don the *gabi*, a white vestment wrapped around the body in a way that symbolizes the cross. The sign of the cross is also used by Orthodox household heads to bless food, and so are Amharic prayer formulas which replace Aari'af blessings. Rather than 'Aari *gola* (beer)' the Orthodox prefer to drink 'Gamma beer', which is of a finer texture and more expensive in preparation. And various 'Aari customs' are discarded in favour of Gamma ones, on which more below.

Now, the concept of ‘becoming Gamma’ was already encountered in Chapter 3. There we saw how people embrace development and the consumption of ‘Gamma goods’ as a way to achieve this transformation. I explained that the aspiration to become Gamma is part of the aspiration to gain a ‘great’ name: Gamma being deemed superior to Aari, to become Gamma means a gain in reputation. The very same understanding is at play in the case of conversion to Orthodoxy. This is why Orthodoxy contributes to converts’ name in a more substantive way than just granting them the respectability of having a religion. More than a way to rid one’s name of the blemish attached to being *alem*, Orthodoxy affords a way to magnify one’s name by becoming Gamma.

To sum up, my main argument in this section has been that conversion to Orthodoxy was driven by the value of name. This is not to say that the aforementioned conflicts with lineage heads played no role whatsoever. On the contrary, the need to look for a new source of blessings certainly provided the immediate trigger for conversion in most cases. Yet, as I have explained, blessings could have also been secured without conversion, by drawing on *karta* ways for dealing with obstinate lineage heads. That elders nonetheless opted for conversion shows that they were after more than just blessings, and this ‘more’ I suggest was an improvement to their name.

But what exactly does it take to realize the value of name through Orthodoxy? And what does it take to preserve or reproduce the purity Orthodoxy is thought to afford? What sort of change in practice does all of this require? And what else other than ‘name’ might converts find attractive about Orthodoxy? In the following section I address these questions by taking a closer look at the social and religious life of the Orthodox community in Dell.

5.4 Fasting and Feasting – The Social and Religious Life of Orthodoxy in Dell

With his ethnography from the Zege peninsula in Northern Ethiopia, Tom Boylston has offered us an excellent account of what Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity looks like in a place where it has been firmly established for centuries. On Boylston’s account, the lives of Orthodox lay people in Zege are marked by two main forms of religious engagement (2018: 70, 37). First, there is fasting – abstaining from animal products on Wednesdays and Fridays, during Advent and Lent, and possibly at other times of the year. Second, there are ‘calendrical events’, notably Orthodox holidays and Saints days, and here feasting plays a key role.

Boylston's characterization of lay Orthodox life has great purchase for the case of Dell: here, too, fasting and feasting are the two main pillars of religious life. In this section I therefore take a closer look at fasting and feasting, asking what exactly it is that they do for people in Dell. My argument, in brief, is that fasting (alongside other practices of renunciation) is key to realizing the value of name since it makes visible the change and commitment Dell people expect comes with taking up a 'religion'. Feasting, too, shows religious commitment since it is locally understood as an established part of Orthodoxy. At the same time, feasting is also central to the way Dell people have traditionally cultivated respect. Orthodoxy thus allows converts not only to gain respectability but also to revitalize respect, and this makes up its particular attractiveness.



Figure 15. Orthodox Christians from Dell join a procession to the church in Bako

Fasting and the Importance of Discontinuity

Orthodox Christians in Dell take fasting very seriously. Except for one man, I never heard of anyone breaking the fast. On the contrary, there were several occasions on which I was able to witness people's steadfastness. One time, for instance, I accompanied Masmaybab to a conflict resolution, which took place at an affine's house several hours' walk away. We stayed there for close to two days, and during this whole time were hardly served anything other than beer. At the end of the second day, a sheep was slaughtered and people (who were all *alem*) sat down to feast on the meat. Masmaybab, however, despite being very hungry, refused to eat since we were in the middle of the Lenten fast. Instead, he went to sit outside and, somewhat ostentatiously perhaps, slowly munched a handful of roasted grains which he had found in his pocket.

Fasting was also a big issue in Kalibab's household. Since only one of his wives was Orthodox, Kalibab was concerned that the other two might inadvertently serve him the wrong food on fasting days. I repeatedly heard him admonish them to take care, reminding them that even a tiny bit of butter or a drop of milk would render food inedible for him. Also, before entering one of the longer fasting periods, Kalibab commonly asked his wives to gather together all pots, plates and utensils that had ever come into contact with animal products, to wash them thoroughly and to dry them in the sun for several hours.

The importance of fasting became particularly evident in how people reacted to the one man who was known to not always keep the fast, Medaybab. He was frequently gossiped about, and people also told Medaybab to his face that he was not 'walking correctly' and that his laxity was a threat to the good name of the Orthodox community. Moreover, there were concerns about commensality with Medaybab. As Baddi, who is one of the younger men in the church, explained, 'look, when Medaybab comes home drunk and sees that there is milk, he will drink it, even if it's a fasting day... He isn't a clean/pure Orthodox (*nytsu Kristian daki*). Therefore, when he slaughters, we [other Orthodox people] won't eat. It's bad!'

In their emphasis on the importance of fasting, Orthodox Christians in Dell firmly fit into the broader Ethiopian Orthodox landscape. As Diego Malara notes, '[t]here is a wide scholarly consensus that no other Christian group fasts as much as Ethiopian Orthodox Christians do' (2018: 24). And Tom Boylston describes fasting as that which makes people Christians: 'In the eyes of most Orthodox Christians I know, certainly in the villages, if you

follow the fasts you are a Christian and if you don't you are not, and that's really all there is to it' (2018: 42).

So what is the importance of fasting? Among Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa, Malara found that different people attributed varied meanings to fasting including 'forgiveness for one's sins, protection from evils and misfortunes, and blessings in all aspects of daily life' (2018: 24f.). At the same time, people agreed that one of the most important points about fasting was to 'kill the flesh', i.e. to tame bodily desires and impulses (ibid.: 25). In Dell, Orthodox Christians see fasting slightly differently. While they do consider it necessary for blessings (and violations of the fast a source of misfortune), I have never heard them talk about fasting as being about taming bodily desires. Rather, fasting here is conceived as key to maintaining purity. This becomes evident not least in people's reactions to Medaybab. As Baddi puts it above, due to drinking milk on fasting days, Medaybab 'isn't a clean/pure Orthodox'. As a consequence, Baddi and other Orthodox people were adamant that they would not eat the meat of animals slaughtered by Medaybab, since this would threaten their own purity.

A second, closely connected reason why fasting is so important to Orthodox Christians in Dell relates to their quest for name. I have already mentioned that one critique levelled against Medaybab was that his failure to fast properly threatened the good name of the Orthodox community. This was a more general concern. The Orthodox worried that if they did not fast correctly, Evangelicals in Dell would think of them as being Orthodox 'only by name' (*gurri namiken*) but not 'truly' (*dofen*). This, however, would have made them appear as no more than *alem* in disguise, and hence would have undermined their claims to respectability. In other words, to realize the value of 'name' through Orthodoxy, one has to show that one is committed to following its rules and that one has truly changed one's ways.

Fasting is arguably the most important practice for Dell Orthodox to demonstrate their commitment to Orthodoxy. It has the capacity to impress others because it sometimes requires considerable will-power, as when Masmaybab goes to sit outside hungrily while others enjoy a feast of meat. But there are also other ways in which the Orthodox work to 'show change'. Three points can be made.

A first point concerns the discontinuation of *karta*. All converts have stopped participating in lineage rituals and no longer respect any taboos concerning their lineage

head. What used to be given to the *toidi* – first fruits, a fraction of the money made through selling livestock or receiving bridewealth etc. – is now given to the church. Similarly, it is understood that Orthodox should not go to see diviners (*azixandab*). Two or three elders are known to not always stick to this rule. But this elicits criticism from others, and is clearly disapproved of ideologically.

A second point concerns alcohol. In principle, Orthodox Christianity permits the consumption of alcohol; and for most church members, especially the elders, one reason why they think they could not be *amain* is precisely Dell Evangelicalism's strict teetotalism. However, there also was a shared understanding that Orthodox should not drink excessively, not least because this made them an easy object of evangelical ridicule.

Third, the Orthodox in Dell were also concerned to acquire religious knowledge. This stands in some contrast with what has been observed among Orthodox Christians elsewhere in Ethiopia. Thus, Boylston (2018: 70) notes that on the Zege peninsula, religious knowledge is mainly 'the domain of specialists, while for the laity... religious engagement primarily revolves around fasting and calendrical events.' Similarly, Malara (2018: 24) observes that for most of his informants, 'conformity to ritual rules was more important than doctrinal knowledge.' In Dell, however, there was a clear interest in learning about the 'content' of Orthodoxy. This was supported by the fact that the deacons mostly preached in Aari'af and thus were well understood by everyone, which would not have been the case had they preached in Amharic. Also, of those Orthodox men who were literate, a number owned a bible as well as small pamphlets, which they read regularly. I suggest that this concern with religious knowledge reflects the fact that in Dell, Orthodox people above all need to manifest their commitment to their religion vis-à-vis the *amain* majority. As a consequence, evangelical criteria for what constitutes a dedicated or 'real' Christian become a point of reference for the Orthodox. Indeed, this shows not only in the interest in acquiring religious knowledge but also in the problematization of alcohol as well as in the emphasis on 'separation' from *karta*.

All in all, Orthodox in Dell manifest what could be termed an 'investment in discontinuity'. That is, they are concerned to make visible that their practice has changed compared to when they were *alem*. Clearly, this is necessary in order to be able to realize 'name' through Orthodoxy. It is only by showing that one has stopped being *alem*, that one becomes the kind of respectable person converts aspire to be. This investment in

discontinuity means that the case of Dell is not adequately described as ‘syncretism’, if by ‘syncretism’ we mean a conscious project to mix two traditions.³⁴ For Orthodox people in Dell, syncretism does not work because to realize the value they aspire to realize through Orthodoxy requires change. This supports my overall theory that to realize values through new means often requires a considerable change in practice.

Feasting in Gabriel’s Name – Orthodox Ritual and the Revitalization of Respect

If fasting is one pillar of religious engagement for Orthodox Christians in Dell, feasting is the other. There are numerous occasions throughout the year on which congregants come together for commensality. For each of the three main Orthodox holidays, Easter, Epiphany and *Meskel* (Exaltation of the Cross), the Orthodox men form a *mahber* (association) that buys and slaughters oxen. Some of the meat is eaten jointly, and the remainder is taken home and consumed in the household. The Orthodox also feast together to celebrate a child's first birthday or when someone moves into a new house. On such occasions typically a priest will come from Bako to pray and to bless people by sprinkling them with Holy Water. Many members of the congregation have personal vows (*silet*) to a particular Saint, and on the Saint’s annual feast they invite Orthodox neighbours for beer and bread. Finally, on the 19th and 21st of each month, the entire congregation assembles to feast in the name of *Gabriel* and *Mariam* respectively.

Tom Boylston, in a chapter titled ‘Echoes of the Host’, has pointed to the ‘religious significance, by analogy with the Eucharist, of any act of hosting’ (2018: 119). Observing that purity concerns lead most Ethiopian Orthodox lay people to abstain from partaking in the Eucharist for most of their lives, Boylston highlights the existence of ‘a series of practices [that] serve as “echoes” – smaller versions of the same pattern, which allow for everyday relationship-making among people and in the names of saints’ (ibid.). First and foremost among such ‘echoes’ are *zikir*, commemorative meals aimed at saints or Mary (ibid.: 127). Just as the real Eucharist means the communing of humans with God, so in memorial meals, ‘a collective of people and divine agents is brought into being.’ (ibid.: 130).

34 ‘Syncretism’ can be approached from two angles. One can either try to say in objective terms whether something is an instance of syncretism. Or one can talk about whether people themselves aim to syncretize two religious traditions. The latter approach is more comfortable and interesting for anthropologists. This is because the former approach requires a standard of ‘true’ religion against which any given manifestation can be judged as either syncretized or not. But as James Laidlaw (1995: 6) points out, questions of the type ‘are these people really Buddhists, Jain, or whatever?’ are ‘either theological or vacuous’.

The feasts held in Dell on the 19th and 21st of each month are such memorial meals. Referred to as ‘Gabriel’, the feast on the 19th is dedicated to the church’s patron saint and is masculine-coded: the food is provided by one of the men, and only men take confession on this day. The feast on the 21st is dedicated to Mary and here it is the women who take confession and who provide the food. Gabriel is the more important of the two, and tends to be a little more elaborate. It also is the most important ritual of the Orthodox community in Dell overall. As such, it lends itself to a closer analysis of what feasting does for Orthodox people in Dell. Consider the following description which is from the day when Kalibab acted as host.

In the early morning, Kalibab sends his two young sons, Losha and Unta, to cut reeds and decorate the church by spreading them on the floor. He also tells them to buy candles and matches in the village store. Kalibab himself, clad in his white *gabi* and with an air of joyful anticipation, goes on a tour through the compounds of the other Orthodox men to respectfully invite them and their wives to join him in church that day. Meanwhile, his third wife and his two teenage daughters, who had been busy over the past week brewing 40 litres of ‘Gamma beer’, baking two enormous wheat-breads and preparing some 30kg of *shosha* (a mixture of roasted wheat, barley, and dried peas), bring half of this food and drink to the church.

At around ten o’clock in the morning, the church starts to fill up, women sitting on the left, men on the right, older people toward the front, younger people toward the back. Since no deacon has come up to Dell this day, the service is led by Brano. Around 20 years of age and a Grade 10 graduate, Brano has recently returned from a two months theological training in Addis Ababa, organized and sponsored by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. After the choir has sung a couple of *mezmur*, Brano makes the sign that people are to stand up and face the back wall. He then begins to recite psalms from a small booklet, and the congregants repeat certain phrases and cross themselves at different points. After about 15 minutes, people sit down again. Rather than deliver a sermon, as he would on an ordinary Sunday, Brano at this point hands over to his father's father, Geshabab, the first convert, oldest man, and main church leader, whom we have already encountered above.

With a knife that had been stored in the church, Geshabab first carves the sign of the cross into the large bread provided by Kalibab and then cuts off a piece. He steps up in front of the congregation, holding the piece of bread in his left hand and a chalice in his right.

One man after the other, from oldest to youngest, goes up to Geshabab. Facing the congregation each man confesses his sins and asks for forgiveness, which the others pronounce. Each then turns to Geshabab, tears off a crumb of bread, puts it into his mouth, lowers himself by bending his knees and receives a sip of ‘Gamma beer’ – which at this moment is considered *ts’ebel* (holy water) – from the chalice tilted over by Geshabab. When all the men have finished, and while the choir sings two *mezmur*, Geshabab cuts up the rest of the bread and fills a number of plates with roasted grain. Then the food is distributed, and everyone also receives a cup of ‘Gamma beer’. After the concentrated and solemn atmosphere of the service, the mood now becomes light and joyful, and people chat animatedly while they eat bread and grain and drink several cups of beer.



Figure 16. Drinking *ts’ebel* at a Gabriel memorial feast

At around noon, the part in church ends with organizational announcements and a collection of the men's monthly contribution to the Orthodox *iddir* (burial association). Then Kalibab invites the married members of the church to follow him to his house, where he entertains them for the rest of the day with coffee, beer, and liquor, roasted grain and bread. After much merry-making and in a state of happy drunkenness, one of the elders finally gets up, thanks Kalibab for the hospitality and asks Gabriel's blessing for him and his house. 'May your crops grow, may your wives give birth, may your livestock multiply. May Gabriel once again unite us in your house.' Stepping into the balmy night, the congregants part ways – only to unite again two days later for the feast of *Mariam*.

Analysis

In Chapter 1 I analysed commensality as a key technique for realizing the value of respect (*bonshmi*). I made three points. Firstly, commensality presupposes and thus helps to produce social harmony: In Dell, people assume they cannot eat together if there is a conflict among them, and this makes it necessary to solve conflicts before one starts to eat. Social harmony, however, is the precondition for being able to meet each other with respect. Secondly, commensality draws people into respectful interactions: Inviting and following an invitation, greeting each other respectfully, granting precedence by offering up one's chair or by waiting for someone else to start eating, joking with each other in a kindly way – all are deemed expressions of respect. Thirdly, commensality creates relations: To ingest the same food is considered a source of kinship, especially in the case of meat. Also, acts of hosting others create obligations and lead to future return-invitations, and thus to future realizations of respect.

It is important to recall this analysis here because it helps to understand the attractiveness of Orthodox feasting. Orthodox feasting, I suggest, is valuable to people above all as a way to realize the value of respect. The feast of Gabriel perfectly exemplifies this.

To begin with, Gabriel is an institutionalized occasion for conflict resolution. A large part of the ritual in church consists in the men's confession. Those who are not aware to have committed any particular sin commonly pronounce a brief formula like, 'we are human beings, so sin is never far; may God forgive me if I have sinned.' By contrast, those who have sinned – which above all means: those who have been at conflict with another member

of the Orthodox congregation – will talk about this in more detail. In graver cases, the conflict has usually already been dealt with through mediation prior to the service. In the case of minor quarrels, people exchange apologies during the service. It is only when everyone has confessed their sins and all conflicts have been resolved that people start eating. This follows the established understanding that you cannot share food if there are ill feelings among you.

After confession, when the actual feasting part begins, the atmosphere becomes joyful and affectionate. At this point, people commonly get up from their seats and go around to greet each other heartily. The platters with food are distributed by children or teenagers, which represents proper hierarchy – as, indeed, does the fact that it is the oldest man who is granted the right to cut the bread. After a while, and as earlier in the morning, Kalibab respectfully begs the adults to come to his house, and by offering lavish hospitality to his guests, Kalibab shows them extensive respect.

All this reproduces relations among the congregants. Each time, it is another person who acts as host and who thus pays off obligations and creates new ones. There is a clear sense that members of the congregation are linked through ties of spiritual kinship (layered on top of the ‘real’ kinship that exists among many of these people), and that this means that one should also treat each other with special respect outside of the church context. Among others, it entails a commitment to solving conflicts peacefully and to not sue each other in court. It also expresses itself in the solidarity enacted when there is a death in one of the households. On such occasions, other Orthodox, even those living at some distance, will spend a great deal of time visiting, assisting and comforting the bereaved, as is commonly done among close kin.

The feast of Gabriel, then, allows people to realize respect – and so do the various other feasts that regularly unite the Orthodox congregants. Given my analysis in previous chapters, it is not hard to understand why this should be attractive. I have discussed a widespread sense of a decline of respect, and I have explained how this is closely linked to a reduction in commensality. I showed in Chapter 2 that Dell Evangelicalism regards feasting as a source of sin, and that this comes with de facto much reduced commensality among Evangelicals. This also affects non-Evangelicals in as much as there are overall fewer people to engage into reciprocal exchanges of hospitality. In Chapter 3 I showed how, in their quest to build name through development, people have shifted their use of resources

from feasting to acquiring modern goods. Here we also saw that feasting, beyond requiring resources which could be used otherwise, has come to be regarded as an expression of ‘backwardness’, of being ‘concerned only with one’s stomach’. Orthodoxy allows people to reverse this trend. This is because it provides religious legitimacy to feasting. To feast as an Orthodox is simply to do what Orthodox do, it is to show commitment to one’s religion and cannot be read as an expression of ‘backwardness’. As such, Orthodoxy affords a way to revitalize feasting and respect without endangering one’s name.

There remains the problem, of course, that one might desire to use resources for modern goods rather than for feasting – the objective trade-off does not disappear. And while one could think that converts no longer depend on modern consumption since Orthodoxy provides them with an alternative way to build name, this would not correspond to how the Orthodox themselves see things. Progress at development remains an important aspiration for these people. If they do not perceive Orthodoxy as being at conflict with this aspiration, it is because they have enough resources to excel at both. As I have explained, the elders who joined the Orthodox church are almost all very wealthy, and so feasting does not throw them back in any significant way. For these people, it seems, Orthodoxy is a way to have their cake and eat it too.

5.5 Conclusion

In a masterful study of the Alaskan Tlingit people and their engagement with Russian Orthodox Christianity during the 19th century, Sergei Kan (1999) has made observations which resonate with my findings from Dell. One of Kan’s key contentions is that the Tlingit case is only poorly described as one of ‘syncretism’. There certainly were continuities between pre-Christian and Christian practice. However, this did not mean that Tlingit Orthodox practice deviated from Russian Orthodox dogma and liturgy. Rather, the continuities were due to affinities between the two cultural systems. For example, where Tlingit had traditionally been concerned with ancestor veneration, Orthodoxy put high value on a very similar practice, namely the commemoration of the dead (ibid.: 433). According to Kan, these affinities made Orthodoxy directly meaningful to people and facilitated its uptake. Indeed, it also was these affinities, which – after a period of engagement with a thoroughly anti-traditionalist Presbyterianism – made many Tlingit return to Orthodoxy.

‘[A]s Tlingit converts to Presbyterianism gradually realized, the price they had to pay for joining this powerful ... institution was a significant loss of independence, including the freedom to raise and educate their own children according to centuries-old traditions. ... In [the Orthodox church] they could be both “civilized” and respectable but also largely independent, ideologically as well as politically.’ (ibid.: 238f.)

In a way that echoes Kan’s, this chapter has made two main suggestions. Firstly, and with regard to debates about dis/continuity in conversion to Orthodoxy, I have argued against seeing Dell as a case of ‘syncretism’. This is not just because people here *de facto* practice Orthodoxy in the same way it is practised by lay people across Ethiopia, namely through fasting and feasting. They are, moreover, not personally invested in mixing Orthodoxy with their traditional practice. On the contrary, I have shown that there is a real investment in discontinuity, a concern, that is, to show that one has changed one’s ways – that one no longer participates in *karta* rituals, that one keeps the fast, that one knows something about the doctrine of Orthodoxy, and so on. This, I have argued, is necessary to attain and maintain the respectability Orthodoxy is hoped to afford. Secondly, I have argued that despite requiring change, Orthodoxy also affords continuities with traditional practice. In particular, I have pointed to the key role that feasting plays in both *karta* and Orthodoxy, and how this allows people to cultivate respect.

All in all, Orthodoxy’s attractiveness is rooted in the fact that it allows to realize otherwise conflicting values. Not only does it serve as a new and potentially more secure source of blessings, it also brings both greater respectability and the chance to revive a more respectful mode of sociality. At least for those who can afford it, Orthodoxy has thus proven an answer to what in recent years has become a pressing concern: how to become more respectable in the eyes of the wider world without ceasing to respect each other.

6. Conclusion

The starting point of this thesis was a claim frequently heard in my southwest Ethiopian fieldsite: that ‘there’s no more respect these days’. The thesis set out to explore this claim – to understand what is meant here by respect, why people think respect has declined, what accounts for this decline, and how people seek to deal with it.

Bonshmi or respect, the first chapter revealed, in Dell is something that happens between people. Never simply an attitude, respect here always manifests in action: in acts of greeting and deferring, in offering things – from hospitality to labour to first milk – or in refraining from certain acts in another person’s presence. Respect is displayed through fearfulness and unquestioning obedience, through affection and attentiveness. The condition of possibility for realizing this kind of respect is personal interaction. If everyone ‘only sits in their own house’, as Kalinda put it, there cannot be any *bonshmi*. *Karta* or traditional practice, I suggested in Chapter 1, does precisely this: it draws people into interaction. If in looking back to their engagement with *karta* people have a sense that *karta* was ‘good for respect’, this is because it offered them rich opportunities to create the kinds of relations and occasions through which respect could be cultivated. To participate in this cultural formation was to be invited to become kin with a great number of others and to unite for commensality, whether in the context of work or ritual, of conflict resolution or everyday life in the household.

If *bonshmi* depends on relations in which people owe each other respect and occasions on which they are brought into personal interaction, the past two decades have seen changes that worked against these conditions of possibility for respect. Most significant here is the rising aspiration for economic development. It is their tireless working for ‘growth’ which makes people spend much less time and wealth on the relations and activities that afford respect. Grain, money or livestock used for feasts cannot be invested in new business ventures or to acquire tin-roofed houses, clothes and so on. Time spent drinking coffee with neighbours cannot be used to weed garlic fields or see to the optimal growth of livestock. But not only does the quest for development reduce the resources people are ready to spend on relational activities. It also increasingly brings people into open conflict, especially over fields and grazing land. All this contributes to a sense of declining respect – of people being less ready to lend each other a hand, to show generous

hospitality, to subordinate personal material interests to values like neighbourliness or solidarity among kin.

However, it is not the quest for development alone which has undermined respect. I suggested that evangelical Christianity, too, has played a role in this. It is true that Dell Evangelicalism does not feature aggressive rhetorics of ‘breaking’ or ‘spiritual warfare’. On the contrary, this is a Christianity deeply oriented toward humility and love, which emphasizes the importance of being respectful to everyone, whether senior or junior, friend or foe. Dell Evangelicalism’s averse effect on respect is not to do with encouraging conflict. Rather, it is to do with wanting to avoid conflict at all cost. Respect here, one might say, above all becomes a matter of avoiding disrespect. But to avoid a disvalue $\sim X$ often is not the same as realizing the value X . When people are sent home quickly after a funeral, this may hinder them from sinning against each other. But it also hinders them from realizing the positive potentials of interaction.

The Challenges of Social Differentiation

There is a further way in which conversion to Evangelicalism, but also conversion to Orthodoxy, has contributed to what Dell people perceive as a decline of respect. I have only sometimes hinted at this in passing, and therefore want to briefly develop this point here in the conclusion. It relates to increased social heterogeneity or, as one might say, a pluralization of ways of life. Through religious conversion, Dell society has come to feature three distinct ways of doing things – *karta*, Evangelicalism, Orthodoxy – and three associated kinds of person one can be – *alem*, *amain*, *kristian*. It is true that these groups share the same life-world, and that there are numerous ways in which their paths constantly intersect and in which they are linked across religious cleavages: from living in pluri-religious households, kin groups and neighbourhoods, to being brought together in the context of work or political meetings. And yet, there are also tangible divisions – divisions which make it harder to coordinate social life, harder to generate the sense of unity and common purpose that remains a widely shared ideal.

Only take the issue of diverging calendars. Evangelicals and Orthodox rest on Sundays, but for *alem* Sunday is a normal working day. Orthodox and *alem* rest on the 12th, 19th, 21st and 27th of each month, but Evangelicals do not (unless it is a Sunday). What is a major holiday for some people – say the evangelical Christmas or the Orthodox *timket* or the

bi-annual lineage ritual in *karta* – for others is a day without special significance. While some eat meat, others fast.

Indeed, food is another great point of division. Evangelicals refuse to eat the meat of animals sacrificed for the purpose of reading intestines, as happens for instance during *karta* funerals. They also refuse meat broth cooked with blood. Orthodox will not eat meat unless from animals slaughtered by an Orthodox Christian. And most *alem*, in turn, refuse to eat what has been slaughtered by patrikin other than their lineage head. The same for drink: While *alem* and Orthodox drink beer and liquor, *amain* refuse any kind of alcohol – and, indeed, are further subdivided into those who also refuse certain non-alcoholic drinks on the basis of their visual resemblance with alcoholic ones (for instance a non-fermented corn-flour drink that looks like beer), and those who think it is fine to consume these.

These differences in calendars and dietary regimes are strongly felt in Dell, where, as we saw in Chapter 1, sharing food is one of the most important lubricants of social life. Not only have spontaneous exchanges of hospitality become more difficult in this way. It is now also a rather challenging affair to organize larger social events like funerals or weddings, house-warming parties or thanksgiving celebrations held upon obtaining a college degree. A date needs to be found that works for everyone, diverse kinds of food and drink need to be produced, space needs to be divided into areas for those who drink alcohol and those who do not (not least because *amain* are averse to even *smelling* alcohol). Sometimes I even saw screens being built from blankets, so as to shield Evangelicals from the sight of traditional dancing. To coordinate these various demands requires not simply a lot of energy. It is also an easy source of conflict: To work out the details of how to live together in a situation of pluralism does not go without tensions. Here, too, then, there arises a challenge to relating to each other respectfully.

And yet, the very fact that people are committed to dealing with this challenge points us to the ongoing attraction respect holds for them. To be sure, there is disagreement as to how best to realize this value: whether respect ought to be shown directionally or mutually, whether one ought to strive for positive expressions of respect even at the risk of conflict, or whether respect should be above all a matter of avoiding disrespect. But these differences notwithstanding, the basic vision of a world in which people are related to each other respectfully – rather than through antagonism or indifference – remains a shared ideal.

To note this ongoing, shared concern with respect is important for two reasons, one theoretical, the other ethnographic. First, anthropologists critical of the concept of values often point to social heterogeneity to argue that one cannot ever speak of anything like ‘shared values’. But the case of Dell brings to attention what may well be a more general point, namely that social heterogeneity does not necessarily index differences in values. Indeed, heterogeneity may itself be the result of shared values. This is because – depending on their social position and resources – different groups in society may rely on different ways to realize a shared value. Thus, Dell people share the values of blessings, name and respect, but different groups gravitate to different cultural formations to realize these values. Building name through development is easier for rich people, but poorer people can work toward the same goal by becoming religious virtuosi. Lineage heads are better positioned to access blessings through *karta* than those further down in the hierarchy; but younger men and women can access blessings through Evangelicalism, and for elderly men Orthodoxy offers a way to access blessings independent of their capricious lineage heads. The values are the same, the practices for realizing them differ.

A second reason why it is important to note Dell people’s ongoing shared concern with respect is that this sensitises us to their current efforts to revive a more respectful mode of sociality. As we saw in Chapter 5, for some people these efforts are facilitated by Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, which affords opportunities to build relations mediated by commensality. More important in quantitative terms is Evangelicalism’s critique of development, discussed in Chapter 4. The local church may accord low value to commensality, but it places utmost value on humility and mutual respect – on people helping each other freely and giving up their personal interests in favour of God and human others. To defend this vision against the onslaught of the market is, from the point of view of respect, arguably the most significant task Dell people presently face. Just how this struggle will play out in the long-run remains to be seen and clearly merits further investigation.

Values as a Dynamic Force in Social Life

To understand Dell people’s laments about a decline of respect as well as their reactions to this decline, I examined the recent history of Dell. This ethnographic analysis of change has suggested that long-established values played a driving role in the transformations which

Dell has witnessed over the past two decades. I showed that it was the aspiration to realize the value of blessings more fully which motivated people to convert from *karta* to evangelical Christianity. This concern also played a part in conversion to Orthodoxy. Similarly, we saw how a long-standing concern with building name drove people to take up the pursuit of economic development, and, again, also mattered for Orthodox conversion. The engagement with these new cultural formations in each case came with profound changes in people's practice. There were, for one thing, no attempts to 'syncretize' Christianity with traditional practice. Rather, we saw how both Evangelicals and Orthodox Christians had a considerable investment in discontinuity. Also, engagement with development and the market economy here did not serve the end of expanding traditional institutions. Instead we saw that people decisively shifted their use of time and wealth to economically 'productive' activities and investments.

Despite being motivated by long-established values, then, people here changed their practice profoundly – so profoundly, indeed, that their ability to realize respect was restricted. But how is it possible for there to be continuity on the level of values and discontinuity on the level of practice? How can established values drive change? Following Robbins' (2017) suggestion to make analytical use of the distinction between subjective and objective values, and building on the work of Naomi Haynes (2017) and Max Weber (1946), I formulated a model which suggests that personally held or 'subjective' values can motivate people to engage with new cultural formations as means to better realize their own values. Such formations are themselves structured toward certain ends or 'objective values' and people will seek out those formations which are geared toward the kinds of values they hope to realize. However, the sort of practice required to realize those values may be very different from people's previous practice. To realize blessings through evangelical Christianity, for instance, takes a notably different kind of activity than to realize blessings through *karta*. Crucially, it is only by aligning one's practice with the objective requirements of a given cultural formation that one can succeed at realizing its ends. The motivation to affect this alignment is provided by one's own values.³⁵

By offering this model, my thesis contributes to recent efforts to move the concept of values away from its earlier association with social stability and reproduction. Extending

³⁵ Note the implication of this: Since for actors the successful realization of their own values depends on following the logic of the cultural formations in which they participate, the relation between cultural formations and actors is not properly described as one of 'structure' and 'agency' – at least not if 'agency' is taken to mean resistance (cf. Laidlaw 2014: 5ff. for a critique of this usage of the term).

Joel Robbins' (2004) suggestion that changes in values can drive change, this thesis has argued that established values, too, can be powerful drivers of change.

Objections and Responses

At least two major objections could be raised against the argument presented in this thesis. I would like to briefly anticipate these here. The interest of this is not so much a defensive one. Rather, my response to these objections helps to make two more general points about values.

(1) A first possible objection concerns my suggestion that while practices have changed, values have remained the same. It could be questioned whether this is an adequate ethnographic representation of the situation in Dell. And, following on from this, it could be asked whether my argument about established values as drivers of change would break down if values turned out to have changed, too. In this latter case, after all, they would no longer appear as the unmoved movers as which I have presented them, and this could suggest that something else has been driving change in Dell.

To argue against my claim about a continuity in values one could pick up from the observation that there now exist numerous new objects, ideas, practices and institutions which people value and which they did not greatly care about in the past. Tin-roofed houses or education, fasting or being humble toward juniors are examples of things that have only recently started to be valued in Dell. So in what sense does this *not* constitute a change in values?

Let me begin answering this objection by way of a general observation. This is that the value accorded to particular things can change – not due to changes in overarching values – but as a result of new ideas about how the world works. Take breakfast as an example. In the 18th century, the upper classes in northwestern Europe preferred heavily sugared bakery goods for breakfast (Smith 2002: 184). Today, the upper classes prefer what we would spontaneously think of as a healthier breakfast, say, cereals and fruit. However, what has changed here is not the value which breakfast is supposed to realize – it is not that there is now a new interest in 'health'. In the 18th century, too, breakfast was considered 'as

a meal in which one consumed particularly “healthy” foods and drinks’ (ibid.). All that has changed is the understanding of what constitutes healthy food.³⁶

The observation that the value accorded to particular things can change as a result of changed understandings about the world has great purchase for Dell. Take feasting as an example. *karta* and evangelical Christianity clearly differ in the value they accord to it. However, this is mainly due to different ideas about the effects of feasting. In *karta*, there is the understanding that feasting helps to do away with conflicts and to create kinship-like relations. Dell Evangelicalism holds that feasting leads to conflict and that it is not needed to relate people because they are already related through Christ. But the overarching values in both cases are similar: peace, relatedness, respect, and the blessings associated with such a state of social harmony.

Or consider education. Until recently, people in Dell accorded very low value to education. This was reflected in low student numbers as well as in the fact that most students dropped out after one or two grades without having become literate. Today student numbers are soaring, young people are extremely eager to finish Grade 10 and many go to great length to achieve this and to move on to college. Again, this change is largely due to a changed situation and changed understandings about the world: Until recently it was realistic to assume that education was a dead end, since no Aari would ever move up into government employment. Today, there is a good chance that you can make it into government employment. And so while education previously was not valued because it did not have economic use, it today is valued because it has economic use – the overarching value is the same, only the understanding of how education contributes to realizing it has changed.

In short, then, my reply to the above raised objection is this: when I say that values have remained the same, I am referring to overarching values not to the value accorded to particular things. The latter may change due to changed circumstances and ideas.

This answer, however, could elicit a second critique. For it could be said that my claim about a continuity in values only works because the values I talk about are so abstract

36 Roy D’Andrade (2008: 24) makes a closely related point when he observes that differences between cultures are often prematurely attributed to differences in values, whereas the real difference may not be in values but in ‘what-counts-as-what’ in different cultures: ‘when one encounters a society where people do not hook their values to norms and practices the way one does oneself, one is likely to think that what is different about the culture of these people is that it has *different values*. [...] Ethnographers and casual observers see that people have different norms and cultural practices, and they then attribute the values *they* would have to have if they were to do the things they observe people to be doing. This is a fundamental error in attribution.’ (ibid.: 24f., emphasis in original).

and general – health and flourishing, respect and reputation are perhaps things people everywhere care about. In more general terms this critique could be phrased as follows: If only one takes abstraction far enough one will always be able to construct a value which unites what appears as substantially different. One could construct a value of ‘living a good life’ and suggest that a great many cultures are all ultimately oriented toward this one value. Evidently such a statement would be vacuous.

Now, I agree that there is a danger in values analysis to take abstraction too far and to end up with accounts that tell us nothing about what particular people actually care about. I do not think, however, that this is what I have done for the case of Dell. To begin with, it is important to note that I did not *construct* any values, but simply translated the local concepts of *bonshmi*, *nami* and *anze*, into respect, name and blessings. Also, I only used these terms in the way they are used locally. Thus, if *bonshmi*, for instance, appears to cover a great variety of practices and to be applied to diverse situations this is not due to my arbitrary ascription but reflects local usage – and, indeed, tells us much about how central this value is for people.

But there is also a second reply to the objection that my claim about a continuity in values only works due to referring to overarching values. This is the reply that when researching values one has to take one’s analysis all the way through to people’s ultimate values and not stop short at what really is only valued as a means to an end. Thus, if I ask someone why they value working hard and they tell me that it is because they would like to build a tin-roofed house, then I cannot leave it at that but have to go on asking what the tin-roofed house is good for. This enquiry has to be pursued until one reaches the point where what people give as a reason for doing something is felt by them to be self-evidently and intrinsically good. One has to go to the point where ‘the spade turns’, as Wittgenstein (1973: 217) puts it (in the slightly different context of discussing reasons for following rules): ‘If I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”’ This process, however, in Dell continuously leads to the discovery that respect, reputation and blessings are the bedrock of this society.

These then would be my replies to objections concerning my claim that values have remained constant in Dell. But even if these replies are not accepted, this does not necessarily challenge my argument that established values here were drivers of change. It is, after all, conceivable to have a situation where values drive change in the sense of

motivating people to engage with new cultural formations, but where, in the course of participating in these formations people's personal values change. Indeed, some such change may have taken place in Dell, too, especially in the context of religious practice. I have no investment in precluding this in principle. And more generally it would be misleading to suggest that in Dell values only ever stayed the same. If in this thesis I have put emphasis on the stability in values, this is to be seen not least as a relative statement: it is in relation to the profound changes in practice that values appear as relatively constant. While it would not have been impossible to press the data into such a shape as to suggest that there have been changes in central values, this would have done violence to the ethnography. Similarly, I have wanted to emphasize that the changes we see in Dell are not primarily the effect of changed values, but rather are themselves driven by a set of long established values. Values in this case appear as movers rather than as that which was moved. Here, however, a second kind of objection could be raised.

(2) A second query could be whether values really were what drove change in Dell, or whether it was something else, with values either playing no role at all (a claim most anthropologists might find too strong and with which I shall therefore not deal), or with values only playing a mediating role – the role of an intervening variable, rather than that of an independent one. As an alternative explanation, this objection would likely suggest some form of coercion. And it could make this point by constructing for each of the changes I have discussed an account highlighting force and necessity instead of desire and motivation.

When people leave *karta* for Evangelicalism or Orthodoxy, it would be argued on this account, they do so perforce not because they have the vision of a world in which blessings are more fully realized. Experiencing illness, or the death of children, or being faced with a recalcitrant lineage head, they simply see no other choice than to convert. Similarly, it could be argued that there are several factors that compel people to pursue development. First, population growth and land scarcity require them to look for new sources of income outside of agriculture in order to secure subsistence. Second, the Ethiopian state undeniably pushes its citizens to pursue development. Hence, taking up this pursuit may above all be about accommodating oneself to the necessities of life in contemporary Ethiopia. Finally, recalling the fact that people were demeaned by the Gamma (Northern Ethiopians), one could argue that their desire to improve their name through

development follows from an inferiority complex rather than from any genuine vision of the good.

Admittedly, how we explain change is in some measure a question of theoretical preference. If one was committed to showing that change in Dell was the result of coercion, one would be able to present things this way. It is always possible to see the glass as half-empty or half-full, one might say, and to either stress the push factors of change, i.e. the forces behind it, or to emphasize that which pulls people forward, i.e. their values. Yet, this kind of theoretical agnosticism is ultimately not helpful. The question rather ought to be this: how much data can we make sense of through a given theoretical lense, and how much data do we have to brush under the carpet? In the case of Dell, a power-based explanation would have trouble accounting for the ethnography in several regards.

To begin with, the notion that people pursue development out of sheer economic necessity does, so far at least, not hold up to closer inspection. As mentioned before, Dell has profited considerably from climate change, which has permitted planting two crops per year instead of just one. Moreover, the growth of towns like Jinka has come with a rising demand for farm produce, and this allows people to obtain much higher (inflation adjusted) prices for grain and livestock than in the past. It is true that some hardly benefit from this because they have barely enough land to feed their own families. However, and this is a second crucial point to observe, it is often precisely these poorer people who relinquish the pursuit of development in favour of being virtuous Christians and serving in church – whereas the rich are those who strive hardest for development.

Similarly, the idea that state-power is the principle cause of Dell people's engagement with development faces the problem of having to account for why there is so little resistance. To be sure, the Ethiopian state is strong, even at the grass-roots level. But the anthropological literature is full of examples of how subaltern groups can use the 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985) to subvert the systems they are subjected to. Indeed, we saw that far from resisting development, Dell people are often outright enthusiastic about it. This enthusiasm would have to be discounted as 'false consciousness' – a move that anthropologists, for good reasons, have largely eliminated from their repertoire.

In the case of religious conversion, the evidence does not support explanations highlighting necessity over desire, either. I have already discussed this at some length for the case of Orthodoxy. We saw that elders had the choice between a range of *karta* means

for accessing blessings independently of their lineage heads, but that they nonetheless decided to convert. One may add here that hardly any of the elders had actually faced acute suffering prior to conversion, but that most had simply worried that their lineage head's refusal to carry out rituals would eventually mean harm for them.

Things may seem less clear cut in the case of conversion to Evangelicalism. In accounts like that of Baza, the first convert (Chapter 2), conversion appears as a last-resort measure that was only taken after all traditional means had failed. Indeed, as emerges from Kalinda's account in Chapter 1, in some cases people were not even sure if they would survive conversion. For such cases, it seems inappropriate to describe conversion as fuelled by a broader vision of the good rather than by immediate necessity. Importantly, however, once Evangelicalism had established itself as a potent source of blessings, people converted much more quickly and for problems much less grave than those faced by the earliest converts – or even after they had already been healed by traditional means. This suggests that conversion here was more strongly motivated by broader aspirations to improve one's condition than by immediate necessity. But quite apart from the question of the reasons for conversion, it remains true that one has to ask why people stick with their new religion. Here, I have shown that it is the view that Evangelicalism affords a world with less *gomma* and richer in blessings, which makes being *amain* attractive to people. It is in this sense that religious engagement here is about realizing a broader vision of the good.

All in all then, the evidence supports explaining change in Dell as the result of a quest for the good. It was the desire to better realize established values which ushered in profound social transformations. If this argument is accepted, it is interesting to note that the consequences of change were partly experienced as problematic. This observations leads me to my concluding reflection.

Final Thoughts: The Quest for the Good and the Problem of Unintended Consequences

Two decades ago, James Scott (1998) published his much-read *Seeing like a State*. Scott's topic in this book were what he called 'high-modernist' projects to improve society through rational planning and large-scale, top-down-imposed projects – from Soviet collectivization to compulsory villagization in Tanzania. Why is it, Scott asked, that even though these projects were 'animated by a genuine desire to improve the human condition' (ibid.: 342),

they failed in such horrendous ways. Or, as he puts the question succinctly in his introduction:

‘It is not so difficult, alas, to understand why so many human lives have been destroyed by mobilized violence between ethnic groups, religious sects, or linguistic communities. But it is harder to grasp why so many well-intended schemes to improve the human condition have gone so tragically awry.’ (ibid.: 4).

In tracing Dell people’s attempts to better realize certain values, this thesis, too, has dealt with what could be described as improvement projects. Contrary to Scott’s case, of course, these projects were neither imposed from above nor did they have as their stated aim the large-scale transformation of society. Rather, they were locally initiated and aimed at improvement in particular areas of life. Specifically, these projects were about accessing blessings more securely and achieving greater reputation. Like the schemes discussed by Scott, however, Dell people’s improvement projects went partially awry, namely by undermining respect. And as in Scott’s case, there is, at first view at least, something counter-intuitive about this. We are used to the idea that externally induced change – say, in the form of structural adjustment – can have adverse effects on local people. But it is less intuitive why change that is driven by people’s own values should lead them into conditions which they perceive as challenging and in important regards unsatisfying. If realizing values is about moving closer to the good, then how can attempts to better realize values lead away from the good? At the same time, the case of Dell can hardly count as a rare exception. It is a common human experience that trying to improve things is sometimes to make things worse.

Just what accounts for this in different cases might well be an object of enquiry for the anthropology of the good. As scholars like Joel Robbins (2013a: 457) or James Laidlaw (2014: 2f.) have made clear, the suggestion that values and ethics are pervasive in human life does not amount to saying that people regularly manage to achieve what they consider as good. But why exactly is this the case? And, specifically, why is this the case even under conditions that are favourable to striving? Several decades’ worth of ‘dark anthropology’ (Ortner 2016) have offered us ample insight into how people’s quest for the good can be frustrated by various forms of violence and deprivation. But why is it that even where people are not inhibited by such factors, the good is often perceived as hard to attain?

The case of Dell has offered one possible answer to this question, which is likely to apply in other cases, too: The attempt to better realize our values through new means is

inherently risky. This is because we can never fully anticipate the demands these means will make on us, and how heeding these demands so as to realize one value will affect our capacity to realize other values. In Dell, people could not possibly have anticipated the adverse effects development and Evangelicalism were going to have on respect. It is the promises that loom large, not the possible side-effects. In this way, the quest for the good constantly creates its own obstacles. To diminish the gap between ideal and reality in one regard may open up or increase this gap in other regards. My aim in noting this, however, has not been to advance a quietist manifesto for sitting still rather than trying to better realize our visions of the good. On the contrary, my aim in this thesis has been to show that the dialectic of striving for the good and responding to the challenges this can pose is a potent source of change.

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